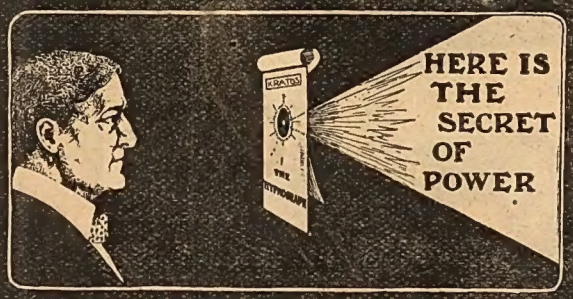
SHORT STORIES. 1D

This little photograph shows the part of the canal where the barge on which Sara was entrapped was situated.

No. 776. Week ending November 14, 1903.

11 NOV 1903

SELF-HYPNOTISM



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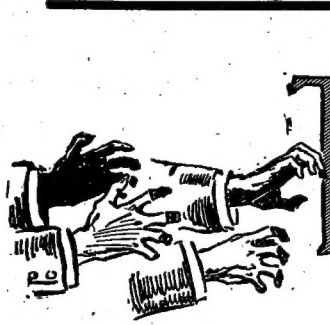

The Pursuit of Sara

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no heir.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and then she took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the race-course, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who tried to get Sara to give up the papers to him.

He took a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to her, keeping a tight grip on her arm.

"Read," he said, "it will interest you."

From the document there stared at her a hideous and distorted likeness of herself!

With a cry she grasped the paper tight, and read, her cheeks aflame, the description of her face and figure that succeeded. It offered a reward of £100 to the person who arrested her! She was in a dire plight!

She just managed to run away from him. She reached her hotel to find an adjacent factory in flames.

Against her window a ladder was placed, and up came Templeton and Rigby Starr! In the latter's hand was a knife!

"Help! Help!" she screamed.

And then, with blind fury, Sara threw herself against the figure clambering into the room, and strove to force him back into the abyss below.

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WHAT HAPPENED BY THE CANAL.

LINKING my arm about his shoulders, I pressed him back with the strength that comes to all of us, even the weakest, at crises in our lives. Gripping the window frame—an inch or two above him—he strove to hoist himself, by sheer power of muscle, into the room. Leaning my whole weight forward, with a sudden jerk, I all but over-balanced him; involuntarily he let go of the frame, and, clutching at me for support, caught me round the neck.

The clasp almost throttled me; instinctively I staggered back, fighting for air.

This movement on my part gave him his chance. Like a flash he released me, aiming a blow at my head that all but knocked me off my feet. Blinded with pain and rage, I flew back to the window, slamming it down before he could withdraw his hand, so that he hung suspended by the wrist.

The cry of agony that broke from him was the signal for an onslaught on the door. Sidney Ilford, realising his partner was in danger, was fumbling nervously with the lock. In a second I crossed the room, jamming myself behind the door, so that when it opened I should be concealed from view.

The next minute the door flew back on its hinges, Ilford, with eyes and ears alone for Rigby rushed to his assistance. Darting from my hiding-place, I rushed from the room down the corridor to the landing, where, by good luck, I found the lift ready and waiting.

"To the hall!" I gasped. "I'm going out," and I settled my hat, somewhat askew from my exertions, straight on my head. When I reached the street, the suddenness of my escape seemed to daze me. It was but a minute since I was upstairs fighting a last forlorn and desperate fight for love and liberty. Now the struggle was over and I was free with the notes and document in my possession.

My mind, working quickly, mapped out a plan of campaign. Hurrying past Campbell Street, still blocked with the crowd of onlookers at the fire, I made my way down Granby Street to a hairdresser's on the right hand side of the name of Jackson, where I remembered having seen the legend "wig maker" in the window.

I had made up my mind not to be driven from Leicester, at any rate until I had seen Maggie and learnt the news she had to tell. In order to carry out my purpose, however, it was obvious that Templeton and Co. must be thrown off the scent. Hitherto I had been the quarry, they the dogs. Now it was time I should play another *rôle*. I would take a leaf out of their book, and so effectually disguise myself that they would not cast a second look in my direction.

After some difficulty I secured a wig that answered my requirements. Of smooth iron grey hair, it completely altered my appearance. From the hairdresser's I hurried to a chemist's, where I purchased a box of rouge, an eyebrow pencil, and a pocket mirror, while from a milliner's next door I procured a dowdy-looking "sailor" in black straw and a thin black veil. Laden with parcels I hailed a four-wheeled cab, and told him to drive down the London Road towards Victoria Park.

I waited till we were clear of the more crowded streets, and then quickly, though with apprehension, proceeded to fix on my wig. Straining my hair back from my forehead, I contrived to coil it into a neat, hard bump. It made my head rather an odd shape, but that was a secondary consideration. The grey wig, parted in smooth bands on my forehead, securely fastened, I turned my attention to the box of rouge. My natural complexion is pale, my skin dead white. By the time I had rubbed on plenty of red colour, deepened my eyebrows from pale brown to black, I do not think my dearest friend would have recognised me. I am sure Noel would have passed me by. In my black coat and skirt, my neat sailor hat and veil, I looked a middle-aged woman of healthy, if plain, appearance.

My toilette finished, I packed my hat into a parcel, and, stopping the cab, alighted on the outskirts of Victoria Park. The cabman, whatever he thought, made no comment on the alteration in my looks, but contented himself with demanding just double his legal fare.

I paid what he asked, then, turning into the park, quietly deposited my hat behind a clump of trees. Some ten minutes later, seated on the top of a tramcar, I passed Harrington Shackel tearing along the road at a terrific rate. He scanned the tram as it passed him, but his eyes passed me by indifferently; he did not know me!

Having dispatched a long and urgent wire to Maggie warning her against the renewed activities of Templeton and Co., and appointing the "Old Gateway" as our meeting-place for to-morrow morning at 12.30, I judged it time to get something to eat.

It was now close upon half-past four, the fire had died down, the crowd of sightseers dispersing thronged the streets.

A certain little restaurant at the corner of Campbell Street, "Bottini's," struck me as a pleasant refuge from the turmoil.

I entered and took a seat at the far end of the apartment facing the door.

I was half through an appetising meal of lamb cutlets and green peas, when my attention was arrested by the occupants of an adjoining table. I had paid but little attention to my surroundings hithero, thankful for a short respite from the danger and excitement that of late had been my daily portion. I had eaten my dinner oblivious of what was happening round me.

The sound of a sharp metallic laugh roused me. Turning my head, I saw, at the table next but one to mine, Templeton, Shackell, and Rigby Starr!

Forgetting my disguise, I was within an ace of starting to my feet and making a wild dash for the door. I only just saved myself from such an act of folly, and, trembling with the strain, I leant back half dead with fear.

"A wild cat!" cried Rigby, who had suffered most through my escapades. "I should like to throttle her."

"So you said before," interrupted Shackell, "you don't seem able to carry out your wishes."

"You've nothing to boast of," retorted the other, "she fooled you pretty well."

"For Heaven's sake don't quarrel," interrupted Templeton. "Time's precious, while you sit here and argue, the little cat may be making good her escape."

"No chance of that," said Rigby, "we're watching all the stations and the hotels. She can't give us the slip this time. Her red head's not easy to overlook."

"Leicester's a large place," said the senior partner. "A sharp-witted woman like her could contrive to lie low for some time."

"What do you think we ought to do, then?"

"We shall have to get at her through the people at Northampton. I've wired to an agent there, and told him to shadow the Dunkley girl till further orders. Meanwhile," he glanced at the clock, "we've other matters to discuss. Where's Ilford?" and he glanced sharply at Shackell.

"He's posted at the hotel. He persists in thinking Miss Gillespie will come back there to ask for letters."

"Maybe he's right. At any rate let him stay there for an hour or two. In all other regards," he lowered his voice and looked round cautiously, "things are very satisfactory. It could have been wished that the affair had been finished quicker, but——"

"Is the cash right? That's the question," said Starr.

The senior partner nodded.

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"Not a doubt," he said, "and now," he rose as he spoke, "I think we'd better be going. Tell Ilford to meet me outside the Palace Music Hall at eight o'clock to report. Starr can take his place, and Shackell"—the senior partner smiled—"you know what you have to do?" he queried softly.

Harrington nodded, and the glint in his eyes sent a shiver through my very heart.

I had made shift to continue eating my dinner while they talked, holding an illustrated paper as a screen before my face. As Templeton turned to go, however, I forced myself to lay the paper down. Now was the time to test the efficacy of my disguise. If they recognised me, it was better they should do so here in a public restaurant where, at any rate, I should be safe from personal violence, than in a more remote spot.

Slowly I raised my eyes and looked at them all three in turn. They glanced at me, but took no notice and passed through the door.

As for me, I could hardly believe in my safety—and their stupidity. They had been within a few feet of me, had looked at and criticised me, and—blessings on my wig and my beautiful red cheeks, had not known that I was Sara!

My spirits rose at the thought of my cleverness. I grew bolder, and decided I would go to the Palace at eight o'clock and endeavour to overhear what took place between Templeton and Sidney Ilford. I was so elated with my small success that I under-estimated the resources of my enemy. Templeton was far too old and too experienced a general to be outmatched by me.

I waited in Bottini's till a quarter to eight, watching the stream of customers that in little groups of two and three came there to dine. Horsey-looking men with pretty women, clergymen with badly-dressed wives, one or two actresses from the local theatre with their local admirers, and a sprinkling of commercial travellers.

The streets, full of life and motion, were at their brightest when I left the little restaurant. The crowds outside the popular music hall reminded me of London, and brought a pang of home sickness. The hall itself, tastefully decorated, and bright with paint and gilding, was crammed to overflowing at the commencement of the show, with an appreciative and hilarious audience. I caught sight of Templeton's tall figure at the box office, and after a discreet interval I took a ticket in the same part of the house as he selected—the stalls. It happened by good fortune that my seat was in the very row immediately behind his. There was a vacant chair beside him, and once or twice he glanced round the theatre as though looking for the person for whom he had reserved it.

The performance had not long commenced before the guest arrived. It was Sidney Ilford—as I had expected. Under cover of a "serio-comic" with full orchestral accompaniment, Ilford rapidly detailed his movements.

Leaning forward, my eyes fixed on the stage, my face set in a smile of expectant delight, I contrived to overhear the conversation without rousing suspicion.

"She's not been back," said Sidney. "But about half an hour ago a boy came along with a telegram. I told him I was expecting a wire and glanced at the envelope to see the name on it. Imagine my delight when I realised it was for our dear Sara. Ray is the name she's chosen this time, as I happened to discover when she came to the hotel. I watched the boy deposit the wire in the office, and came off here, leaving Rigby on the watch outside."

"What's the use of that?" said the senior partner. "You should have offered to take the telegram to her, said she was downstairs at the door, or something of that sort. Whatever is the good of leaving the thing in the office?"

"I had to," was the answer. "She's given explicit instructions that letters and wires are to be delivered to her personally. I heard her myself."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"You must go at once to the hotel and explain that you're a friend of the family, that she's stopping with your wife, and that you've called for her bag and any letters there may be. They'll believe your story like a rocket, especially if you offer to settle the bill. It's no use for me to try the game on, staying in the same hotel they wouldn't credit it, and Rigby they would recognise as well. I brought him down to the office when he fell through Sara's window. You're the only person they'll believe."

"Meantime the girl may go back and claim it?"

"Impossible, Rigby's posted on the steps of the hotel. She can't pass without his seeing her."

Turning my head I saw at a table near to mine, Templeton, Shackell, and Rigby Starr.

"I suppose the wire's from Northampton?" said Templeton.

"Perhaps, unless——" Ilford's head drew close to the other's, and his voice dropped to a whisper.

In my anxiety to catch what he was saying, I forgot the need of caution and turned my face from the stage towards him.

In an instant Templeton observed me.

"Have you dropped anything, madam?" he said coolly. "You appear to be looking in this direction."

"My programme," I stammered. "I think——"

"Your programme is in your hand," he said. Then, in a loud voice to Ilford:

"We will resume our conversation later on. Our talk distracts this lady's attention from the stage."

Several people heard the rebuff and stared at me in the delighted fashion people adopt when a third party is rebuked.

I sank back in the seat, nervously clutching the unhappy programme. My eyes upon the stage I took in nothing of the performance. Figures came and went, sang and danced, and to me the whole show was a blank. My mind was fixed on one thing, and one thing only. How should I circumvent Templeton, how stop him claiming my wire?

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The number of a fresh turn went up. Templeton, glancing at his programme, announced that it was "Herbert Campbell."

"We may as well wait and hear him," he said.

Ilford nodded and laughed uproariously, as the great Herbert, in the garb of a policeman, walked, or rather waddled, on to the stage.

The two conspirators were safe for five minutes at least. If I left the theatre first, I should have a clear start. Once let me get out of the building, away from the blaze of light, the blare of sound, and some inspiration might come to me. But how could I leave without attracting their attention? I had already roused Templeton's suspicion, a move on my part would increase it. And yet, a middle-aged spinster—to all appearance I looked the part—could surely leave a music-hall without exciting comment. I might be shocked at the performance—alas! I had gazed with riveted attention at a short-skirted danseuse. What could I do?

Suddenly I started to my feet.

"I feel faint," I gasped, clutching hold of my neighbour, a dark, handsome-looking girl. "Please let me pass. I——"

"Lean on me," she answered readily. "Here, let the lady by, will you?" as one or two protested, "she's ill, poor thing."

"Shouldn't come to a hall, at her time of life," cried a shrill-voiced woman.

Careless of remark I clung to my pioneer, and passed down the row of seats in safety. Reaching the door I glanced back, and, to my horror, saw Templeton and Rigby preparing to leave.

"Thank you," I gasped, dropping the arm of the dark-haired girl. "It's very kind of you. I'm much obliged." and leaving her abruptly—and in open astonishment—I darted down the steps and across the road.

From where I stood I could see the entrance to the Palace plainly. I had not long to wait before Templeton appeared. In piteous indecision I watched the portly figure descend the steps, each minute gave me less time to act, brought him nearer to his goal—the wire that was lying at the hotel.

An urchin from the gutter, a pale-faced, keen-eyed Arab of the pavement nudged my arm.

"Mother's in gaol," he said in a hoarse voice, "and father's dead. I've no shoes"—he glanced at his bare feet—"and I'm hungry. Mother's in gaol."

He did not ask for money; only repeated his plaint, his eyes large and sombre fixed on mine. A sudden thought flashed through my mind.

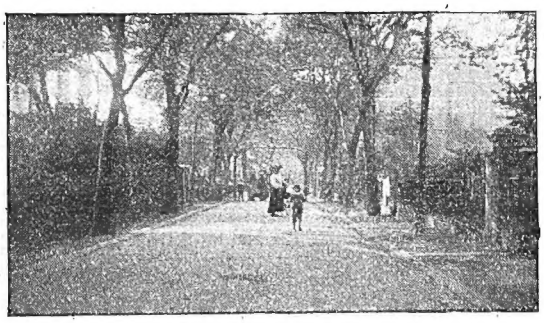
"You see that gentleman?" Stooping, I caught hold of the boy's arm, and pointed to the senior partner.

"Which?" said the boy, with an artful leer.

"That one," I repeated, slipping a shilling in the grubby hand. "That tall, stout man with the high hat and grey whiskers. Do you think"—I clutched the urchin tight—"do you think you could—upset him?"

"I might," said the boy stolidly, "for half a crown."

"Here's three shillings. He's a bad man, a wicked man



The New Walk, Leicester, where Sara encountered Templeton, who penetrated her disguise.

He wants to put little boys like you in prison. He wants to put me in prison too. If you can upset him, throw him down so that he is quite a long time getting up, I shall be able to run away. Will you do it?"

"I'll butt him in the stomach," he replied cheerfully. "He'll go down—wollop," and the little wretch danced mirthfully.

"Mind you've promised," I cried, as he darted from me—a frail craft on which to set one's hopes.

He grimaced in reply, and grasping a packet of newspapers under his arm, raced to the fray. Speeding across the road, head down, voiced upraised crying his wares, he charged full tilt against the senior partner, and, bless his little dirty face, sent him spinning in the mud.

Miss Sara Gillespie as she was before she assumed her disguise.

I waited for no more, but ran at top speed, a pace unbefitting a middle-aged spinster—down Granby Street, not pausing till I came within sight of the Hotel.

I walked boldly and unchallenged past Rigby Starr, up the stairs right to the office. There, just inside the window, I could see my telegram. The sight gave me confidence and courage.

"Good evening," I said boldly to the manageress. "You had a young lady, a Miss Ray, stopping here? She is my niece"—I cased nearer to the door that fenced off the office from publicity. "She's a good girl," I said softly, "but, but—just a little flighty. Her mother, who lives in Northampton, met her in Granby Street to-day and took her home. She sent me on to explain to you and fetch her bag and pay her bill. You see, she had differences at home. A young man? More than one, I fear." I shook my head and looked unutterable things. "My goodness me, if there isn't a telegram for her." I stretched out my hand, and, yielding automatically to the demand, the manageress handed me the wire.

"Is Miss Ray not returning?" she asked.

"Dear me, no, her mother won't let her away again in a hurry. What did you say the bill was? Thank you, that will settle it, I think, and I'll occupy her room to-night. Name?" I paused. "Dunkley," I said. "Miss Dunkley from Northampton. One moment *please*. If anybody should inquire for my niece—a gentleman, you understand—don't let him know she's left, he'll go off post-haste to Northampton and worry my poor sister to death. Tell him Miss Ray's here, and that she's gone to bed. You understand? Good night," and clasping my telegram I rushed—my excitement was too great for steady walking—up one staircase—just as Templeton and Ilford came up the other.

I listened to the senior partner's well-phrased tale, and gloated over his discomfiture, when at the conclusion of his speech he was informed that "Miss Ray was upstairs in her room and had received her telegram."

"There's a mistake somewhere," the manageress continued. "I've had a lady here just now, Miss Dunkley, who assured me that Miss Ray had been with her mother since dinner. Perhaps you'd better see the lady?" She rang a bell and sent a chambermaid to summon me.

"Go up to No. 63 and say they're wanted."

"Kindly say that Mr. Masterman is here," said the senior partner, and the indignation that I felt at the heartless lie seemed to choke me. Swiftly I hastened up the stairs. Another flight and yet another. And then across the dark corridor into my room, where having locked the door, I cast myself upon the bed.

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In answer to the maid's knock I sleepily asked "Who's there?" and in reply to her statement that Mr. Masterman awaited me, I bade her tell that gentleman "that I am not acquainted with anybody of that name."

I buried my head in the bed-clothes as her footsteps died away, and choked with hysterical laughter at the thought of the senior partner's face when she delivered her message.

"Checkmate!" I cried. "Checkmate!" Then, groping for the matches, I lit the gas and greedily opened the wire.

"I shall be with you to-morrow. Maggie Dunkley will not tell me where you are or I should come to-day. She fears I am an impostor. She sends this for me. Dearest, my heart's fond love, Noel."

From Noel, from my sweetheart! Dear Heaven, if I had failed in my attempt, if the telegram had fallen into Templeton's hands! And he will be with me to-morrow, all our troubles over, our sorrow past. The vile conspiracy that has separated us will be ended, done with at last.

In a passion of tears, glad tears that spring from an overcharged but grateful heart, I kneel beside the open window turning my face upward to the sky. To-morrow the stars will shine upon us two together! The moon that casts its silver cloak over the blackened ruins of the factory will shine upon my heart and I—my dearest heart, my love, my Noel!

The wig that had done me such good service I plucked off and threw contemptuously aside. I let down my hair, and ran my fingers through its length. He loved it and admired it, therefore in my sight it was fair. To-morrow I should feel his arms about me, his dear lips upon my own. To-morrow——

Sunday dawned clear and bright. The bells chiming for early service woke me from pleasant dreams. It seemed to me an omen of good hope that the sun shone so pleasantly, that the air was warm and soft. Not until I was dressed did I remember with a shiver of compunction, that I should be compelled to put on that hideous wig. I came here last night as Miss Dunkley, middle-aged and grey-haired. I must depart in the same guise. Besides it would be more than probable that I should encounter one of the firm on guard outside the hotel. If I appeared red-haired and pale-cheeked, I should be discovered and my meeting with Noel prevented.

I was so excited at the prospect of re-union with him, that I forgot the conversation I had overheard in Bottini's restaurant. I did not remember that Templeton had spoken of having communicated with their agent in Northampton charging him to shadow Maggie Dunkley, wheresoever she might go.

Careless and light of heart I left the hotel, and all-impatient for the moment when my friend should tell me of Noel, hastened to the meeting place a good hour before the appointed time, and pacing to and fro in the shadow of the old gate, pictured the happy meeting that was in store for me.

Maggie, trim and neat in her Sunday frock and feathered hat, was punctual to the moment. Far too anxious to be prudent, I flew to her side, and heedless of hostile eyes, embraced her fervently.

The boy sped across the road, and sent Templeton spinning into the mud!

She drew back astonished, as might be expected, from the clasp of the strange grey-haired woman.

"You don't know me, dear," I said, laughing. "Of course not, how should you recognise me? I'm Sara—Sara Gillespie. Look, and unpinning the sailor-hat I tore off my false grey locks, showing my own red hair as testimony.

I thought even at the moment that I caught an exclamation from the other side of the arch, but put it down in my heedlessness to the surprise that anyone might feel at the sight of a lady divesting herself of her head-dress.

"Dear goodness, you have given me a turn," cried Maggie, gazing at me as though doubtful even now of my *bonâ fides*.

"Where's Noel?" I cried eagerly. "Tell me, Maggie, what have you done with him?"

"I'm not sure, till I've asked you certain questions, if the young man who came *is* Noel," she answered. "Do you describe him, carefully, and I'll see if what you say agrees with the description I put down."

"Tall, broad-shouldered, clean-limbed. Dark brown hair, with a slight wave; clean-shaven, square white teeth, brown skin, and a lovely smile.'

Maggie grinned at my enthusiasm.

"I think it's all right," she said cautiously. "But to make sure I'd better repeat what he said. He told me that your full name was Sara Christabel Gillespie. Is that true?"

"Quite. You needn't worry, Maggie, it's the right man at last."

"You're sure? Remember you made a mistake before."

"Well, you shall be with me when I meet him, so if he is an impostor no harm can come."

"Very well, Jim thinks you'd better let him come as well. He'll bring Mr. Masterman along, and I'll go with you. What do you think of meeting him near the canal? It's pretty there, and nice and quiet. There are such lots of people in the parks on Sunday. Jim's sister-in-law has a cottage close to the waterside; we could go there and have tea."

"The canal or anywhere else so long as Noel is there," I answered. "Tell me, Maggie, why didn't he come with you this morning?"

"He wanted to," she answered, "but I was afraid. Jim said I must be sure that he's the right man before I let you see him. He's in Northampton now, waiting with Jim. He doesn't know I've come to Leicester," she added laughing. "I'm to send a telegram when I leave you, and when they get it Jim and he will set out at once. There's a train will bring them in about half-past three."

"Oh, Maggie," I cried half in despair, "you shouldn't have kept him from me."

"I like that," she answered angrily, "a nice state of things there would have been if I had brought the wrong one to you."

I realised the truth of the words, but, all the same, I felt a foolish sort of resentment that Noel had been kept from me. At length Maggie proposed that we should go to the house by the canal to wait there for Jim Goodman and my sweetheart.

"You'd better fasten on your wig," she added, "you'll be spotted at once without it."

I complied with the request, and together we set out for

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Mrs. Goodman's house, calling at the post office on our way. The house proved to be quite half a mile from the canal, and one of a row of cottages off the Abbey Park Road. The place was small, the children numerous and noisy. It seemed impossible for me to spend the time waiting for Noel in such uncongenial fashion.

"I shall go for a walk," I announced. "I'm too restless to stop indoors. I'll be back here at three sharp, Maggie."

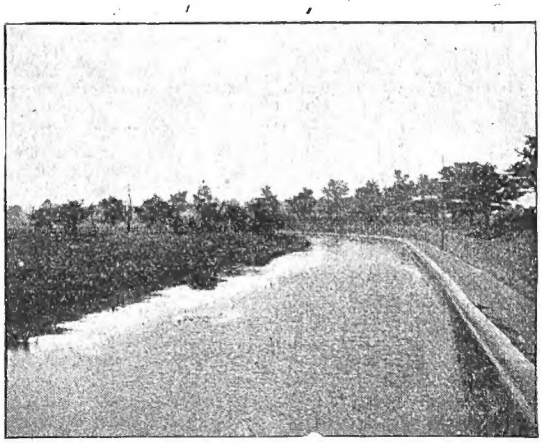
"Don't be late," she answered. "I'd better show you the spot where we arranged to meet. Jim thought you'd rather your young man shouldn't see you first of all at his sister's. It is not far, not more than ten minutes' walk."

She put on her hat and accompanied me with several small children across a stretch of meadow land to where the green-sward sloped to the water's edge. The towing path on the other side of the canal lay bare and brown in the bright sunshine. The scene was very beautiful, the day very pleasant.

"You won't mistake the spot?" asked Maggie. And then, "Don't you think you'd better wait with me at Gracie's? Suppose anything goes wrong?"

"Impossible," I answered. "You and Jim have been far too careful in your arrangements; I shall be back at the cottage at three."

I watched her figure cross the field, skirting a belt of trees and a pleasant hedgerow. Then, too restless and excited to remain still, I crossed the bridge a little higher up and tramped along the tow path till I reached St. Margaret's works. Leaving the water behind me, I tramped through the narrow streets till I gained the centre of the town. Leicester on Sunday morning after church is a sight worth seeing. All the work girls and operatives in their Sunday bravery throng the parks, the squares, and the principal streets. One hardly sees an ill-dressed girl; they keep indoors on Sunday!



The Canal, where Sara and Noel came so close together, and yet were powerless to communicate with each other.

The seats in the Municipal Square were gay with flowers, feathers, and silks; dainty toilettes, costly gowns met one at every turn. I found a vacant place on one of the seats, and found distraction for my thoughts in watching the scene around me.

Suddenly from a group of bright colours, a blue frock and picture hat detailed itself.

"Are you better to-day?" said a pleasant voice; "you *were* bad last night, poor thing!"

Glancing up I recognised the girl, who, thinking I was faint, had escorted me from the music hall.

"Much better, thank you," I returned.

"I was quite anxious about you," she went on, "especially after the funny way you left me. You looked quite scared; I couldn't understand why you ran off like that. This gentleman," she motioned to a portly-looking person standing with his back towards us, "this gentleman was as concerned as me."

As she spoke the individual referred to turned, raised his hat, and advanced to meet me. Then, if ever, I had need of all my courage, my resources. The man who stood with outstretched hand before me was none other than the senior partner, Templeton himself!

The impulse of flight seized me once again, my eyes refused to meet his searching glance, my voice, sunk to a husky whisper, was beyond control. I gripped the seat hard, and waited till the ground steadied beneath my feet.

"It is very kind of you to feel concern on my behalf," I said and my voice was thin and quavering. "Few people care to trouble about an old woman like myself. I ought not to have ventured in a music hall in my frail state of health."

"Did you enjoy the entertainment, Miss——" He paused interrogatively, and in the accent of his voice, the twitching of the upper lip that showed the yellow pointed teeth, I realised he had penetrated my disguise. But—and in that lay my chance of escape—it was evident the dark-haired girl was not one of his employées. He had introduced himself to her notice on the common ground of their concern for me. It was obvious that in the event of a scene she would be more inclined to take my part than his. She had friends with her, a party of girls and young men. While I remained with them I was safe from any attack.

I disregarded Templeton's request for my name and answered placidly that "a part of the performance had seemed interesting."

Then turning to the girl in blue I laid my hand on her arm.

"I wonder if you'll take pity on a lonely old woman and let her spend an hour with you? I like young girls, especially when they're pretty and nice as you. It would be a real kindness if you'd bear with me a while?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," said the young lady with a little giggle, and linking her arm in mine, she led the way across the square and in the direction of "The New Walk"—a broad path shaded by leafy trees.

Her friends, following our lead, walked close behind; Templeton beside us. Up and down the Avenue we paced, the senior partner watchful and alert, purring soft speeches to the girl in blue, who, flattered at his attentions, kept giggling and throwing glances at her friends. In the middle of the walk, we suddenly encountered a couple of the "blue girl's" admirers, they seized on her, evidently regarding Templeton and myself as intruders of a most undesirable type.

The senior partner seized the opportunity to draw close to me. Impatience got the better of caution, for once his acumen failed.

"Thief!" he said. "Thief! I'll have you in gaol before the morning."

In a second I flashed past him to the girl in blue.

"My dear," I said, "your friend," I pointed to the senior partner, "is, I fear, insane. He has just accused me of theft. I never saw the man before last night. It has upset me terribly. I must ask you to remonstrate with him. I'm sure," I turned to the young men, "you would not see an old woman abused before your eyes? He spoke of taking me to prison."

"He's no friend of mine," said the girl quickly.

"Then how dare he walk with you?" cried one of the admirers, facing up to Templeton.

"If you don't mind, my dear," I whispered, "I will go away. I cannot bear a scene. My heart's not strong, but really your friend's too outrageous."

Leaving the senior partner the centre of an excited group, I slipped down a side turning, and hurried into a church conveniently near.

Here at any rate I was safe, in sanctuary no one could touch me!

The clock had chimed the hour of three before I felt able to leave the building. I was weak and trembling, full of forebodings and bitterly repentant that I had not stayed with Maggie at the cottage near the canal.

I took a tram from the Clock Tower to Abbey Park and arrived at the street where Mrs. Goodman's house was situated

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twenty minutes later. One of the children met me at the top of the road. She ran towards me, her face alight with expectation.

"You're not to go home," she said. "I was to tell you that Maggie was waiting for you by the water, and that you must not go near the house because somebody was watching."

She ran off, having delivered her message, without giving me time to question her further.

I was half inclined to disregard the injunction; I had promised Maggie to call for her, and it seemed unaccountable she should have changed the plan. Still, it would be risky to disregard so plain a warning. Possibly one of the firm was at this moment lurking round the corner.

And yet I was undecided, and when at last I turned my back on the road, and walked alone to the meeting place, I did so with a heavy heart.

There was no sign of anyone at the rendezvous. Steeped in the calm of a Sunday afternoon the landscape was void of man or woman. In the distance a barge lazily drifted towards me, drawn by a patient looking horse that plodded on without a driver. A distant clock chiming half-past three, I ran up the slope eagerly searching the horizon. No one in sight, only the barge lazily drifting nearer.

Should I return to Mrs. Goodman's cottage? The idea was not feasible. I might fall into the hands of the enemy, besides, in my absence, Maggie and Noel might arrive.

Was it possible the message given by the child was a false one? She might have been bribed to deliver it. I was sure Noel would be waiting for me at the cottage.

Noel—I started round in the direction of the house only to pause in piteous indecision.

Perhaps I should meet him on the road? He would not know me in this hideous disguise. And yet I dared not deprive myself of the poor shelter it afforded me. Surrounded as I was with plots, hemmed in by foes, more cunning, more powerful far than I, it would be madness to abandon that which had once saved me.

As time went on, and still there was no sign of those I waited for, my mind grew apprehensive of a fresh plot. Perhaps Maggie herself had been deceived. It was possible that the man she saw was, after all, an impostor. She had been induced to make this appointment with me, in order to facilitate the scheme of my capture. And I—fool that I was—had played into my enemy's hands by refusing to remain at the cottage. For the sake of sentiment, because I wanted to spend a few hours alone, to dream of my lover and the approaching meeting with him, for the sake of idle folly, I had, it seemed, destroyed all possibility of re-union.

Where were they? I ran to and fro, scouring the distance with tear-dimmed eyes. Dear Heaven, surely I was not to suffer this great disappointment? Surely this time all would be well. My lips parched with anxiety, murmured his name, my heart, tired with the passionate throbs of fear that so perpetually convulsed it, thrilled with a fresh pang.

Suddenly the figure of a girl running towards me came into view. Close behind her were two men. The height and build were strange to me. They were gaining on the girl, who kept looking eagerly ahead. From the trees where I kept watch I could observe them plainly, but I was hid from view. As the girl came nearer I recognised her face and figure.

It was Maggie! Maggie pursued, I felt it, by the agents of Templeton and Co. My fears were realised. We had fallen the victims to a fresh conspiracy. In a little while they would catch sight of me, reach my side, and then, all efforts unavailing, the papers for which I'd sacrificed so much would be wrested from me, Noel's fortune taken from my hands.

I glanced round hopelessly. As yet I had not been perceived. There was a chance, the barest chance, I might escape them. The barge by this time had drifted to within a few feet of where I stood. I had but to make a rapid dart from the shelter of the trees—but a short distance from the water—and, jumping from the beach, scramble on board and trust to my wits to find a safe hiding place.

Swiftly I put the project into operation, I reached the water's edge, halloed to the boy who sleepily held the rudder, then, wading into the water, climbed cat-like up the rope trailing at its side. An awning stretched half down the deck made a sort of cabin. In a second I dived under the tarpaulin, and made for some sacks of flour behind which I crouched.

Something from the far end of the vessel moved towards me. I paid but little attention to the noise, my energies were concentrated on the figures running to the shore.

Of a sudden, from the darkness behind me, an arm shot out and gripped me by the throat. The next moment, bound and gagged, I lay behind the sacks—helpless and immovable.

My eyes left uncovered, through a rent in the tarpaulin, discerned the figures of Maggie, Jim Goodman, and, yes, my sweetheart, Noel.

With an effort that seemed to break my very heart strings I strove to free my hands, writhing upon the floor, I tried to fix my teeth in the handkerchief that closed my mouth.

Fool! Fool! I had walked open-eyed into the trap. I had of my own will parted myself from Noel and safety.

My lover's voice sounded across the water.

"Have you seen a lady pass this way?"

The sleepy boy murmured a negative.

Impatient at his stupidity, Noel seized the rope hanging at the side and, followed by Jim, scrambled, as I had done, on board.

From my side something moved. My eyes fixed on the light beyond the awning, saw the figure of Sidney Ilford gradually outlined.

In response to further questioning he replied that he had seen and heard nobody.

"I've been dozing for a bit," he said pleasantly. "There's not a soul about this afternoon."

"Could anyone have got on board without your knowing it?"

"Hardly, I think, still"—he smiled—"you can search the barge if you like."

Noel, feeling at a loss, stammered something about trouble.

"Not a bit," said Ilford. "Look by all means."

They searched every corner of the barge, except the corner where I lay concealed behind the sacks of flour.

"I'm very much obliged to you," said Noel. Then, turning to Maggie, "she must have gone back to your place, I suppose."

Maggie agreed. They seemed about to leave the vessel.

Then, but not till then, did the agony of my position come to me. I was here within sight, within sound of my lover, and I could not appeal to him! A red light danced before my eyes, many waters sounded in my ears.

"Noel, Noel!" I tried to shout, but my cries of agony were muffled into a sound so faint as to escape his ears.

I was bound hand and foot, gagged—and he, my lover, did not know it.

They would kill me, perhaps worse, they would take the notes, and the paper——

And then the cold hand of despair clutched my heart.

I was in the power of Templeton and Co. at last!

At length, shifted by my frantic struggles, the ropes that bound me hand and foot, loosened a little of their pressure. Slowly and with infinite pain, I rolled over and over—my bonds were still too tight for me to crawl—towards the opening at the end of the tarpaulin.

Gradually I reached the journey's end. My head thrust under the edge of the tarpaulin, I glanced up pathetically to where my lover stood.

Surely he will see me! He would not leave the woman that he loved, the woman who had risked her life for his to so cruel a fate.

My eyes, fixed on his, wildly, imploringly, sought an answering sign of recognition.

Another moment would decide my fate.

Would he see me, or——

Noel was going to leave the barge!

(Another instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

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..Robbed of a Lover..

The Tale of an Orphan Girl.

My father and mother died in India while I was a mere child, and I was left to the not-too-tender mercies of my father's maiden sister. She was the first of a large family; he was the last, so she was many years older than he. Of the intermediate brothers and sisters I knew nothing, and I have never seen or heard of any relatives on my mother's side.

Aunt Sophia was an austere woman with her own ideas of how a child should be brought up. I was kept practically a prisoner in the big house, standing in its own grounds; I seldom went beyond the boundary of those grounds. My education was undertaken partly by my aunt and partly by an equally austere, not to say sour, and elderly lady, who was dependent on my aunt's bounty, Heaven help her! Both were well educated, but utterly unfitted for imparting knowledge to a child. My spirit was well-nigh crushed under their rigid discipline, and I grew up timid, ignorant of the world, and, consequently, badly-equipped for what was to follow.

My aunt—strange creature!—finding that I did not share her views on certain religious matters, despite her assiduous teaching, turned against me when I was eighteen. I will not attempt to pass any condemnation upon her; I will merely say that she informed me that she had done all she could for me, but as I did not choose to follow her precepts any longer, and as I was now old enough to look after myself, we had better part! At first I did not know whether to be frightened or pleased at this unexpected offer of liberty, but after hurried reflection, I decided to leave her. I think she was surprised; she had probably counted on my being so afraid of the temptations of the world as to beg her to keep me; then, when she saw that I had made up my mind to go, she grew more stony than ever and insisted that I should find an abiding-place within twenty-four hours.

I had a guaranteed annuity of one pound per week, so I felt confident that I could manage to exist without Aunt Sophia. I went boldly to the rector's wife and told her of my dilemma; she took me in hand and finally arranged that I should live with Lady Thornhill.

"She will be so glad to have you, my dear!" said the clergyman's wife sympathetically. "She resides in another part of the country, my own native place, but she is staying with the Crouches here. She is a widow of forty, but as young at heart as any woman of twenty-three, and she likes to have young people round her. She tells me that she is looking for a companion, and that she will be delighted to have you. You will be treated as one of the family."

I hardly know what happened during the next few days; it seemed all hurry-skurry, and I awoke out of this waking dream to find myself installed in Thornhill Grange. How different it was from the old life! In the one place, solitude, severity, where a bright laugh would have seemed a sacrilege; in the new home, all was brightness and gaiety, happy voices and merry laughter!

The next event of my life was when I met Clifford Hazeldene at one of those enjoyable little parties which Lady Thornhill gave so frequently. "I hold that it is part of my mission in life to do my best to make other people happy, my dear!" said the amiable lady, a glorious smile illuminating that attractive and lovable countenance, "and, as I have plenty of money, I give these parties, which *do* make the guests happy for a time!" And I had not been at the Grange more than three weeks when I met him.

I have often wondered why I made such an impression on him! I have looked at myself critically in the mirror, but the reflection does not give a sufficient answer, I think. Neither then, when I was eighteen, nor now, when I am turned twenty-two.

It is difficult to describe one's self, so I will repeat Lady Thornhill's description of me, when she caught me surveying myself.

"A tall girl, with well-moulded figure, just blossoming into womanhood. Naturally graceful, but lacking the finish of graceful movement owing to insufficient training. Just a little awkward in society—also owing to defective training—but that very awkwardness is attractive. A wealth of silky, golden-brown hair, clear, soft eyes, betokening a capacity for great affection, a good complexion, cherry lips, such as ought to make a young man wish that it was Christmas and that a bunch of mistletoe were overhead, and——"

But I stopped her, flushing furiously, and I remember having felt vexed with myself that, at the last words, my thoughts should have flown to Clifford Hazeldene!

That such a man should attract me is not in the least surprising; I marvel that any woman could resist falling under the spell of Clifford Hazeldene! And, for that very reason, I ought perhaps to judge *her* leniently! He was my hero, my ideal! Tall, strong of limb and face, handsome; his eyes were the embodiment of frankness. He was a man who would shrink from nothing, if it were his duty. What more can I say of him? My hand trembles so violently that the writing is scarcely legible! My love!

Lady Thornhill, as hostess, introduced us. An indefinable thrill went through me as I felt the clasp of his strong hand and noted how gently it closed over mine. My eyes fell before his gaze, and I was almost too confused to act in the usual formal manner. I thought of the great Nasmyth hammer about which I had read, how it could do such great things and yet could descend so gently as to crack a nut without touching the kernel, and it seemed to me that Clifford Hazeldene was like that. He would be a strong protector and yet be so tender to the woman he loved!

Somehow it seemed to me that he sought me out during the evening, and I wondered that he could leave the more brilliant Society young ladies in order to converse with poor little me! I liked it; I was delighted, so delighted that I fear I answered foolishly sometimes.

My aunt had never taught me dancing, a defect which Lady Thornhill set to work to remedy without delay. I was an apt pupil, and, by dint of much practice, I acquired a fair amount of skill. Most men with whom I danced that evening must have been annoyed with my awkwardness, but Clifford was quite different, and I got on ever so much better.

We were seated in a corner, during an interval, and Clifford spoke.

"Do you know, Miss Deane, I am enjoying myself immensely this evening!" he remarked, and he glanced at me in a manner which I did not quite comprehend, although I was conscious of a slight burning of my usually pale cheeks.

"I think that Lady Thornhill's parties are very pleasant!" I responded simply. "She is always very pleased to know that her guests have had a good time."

"Y-e-e-s!" he said slowly, looking at me intently. "But I meant that I had enjoyed our brief conversation. You

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know a great deal more than most young ladies, whose talk is rather empty. I——"

"Oh, I do not know how you can say that!" I broke in quite honestly. "They have been out more than I have, and they must have learnt more than I."

"There is knowledge and knowledge," he observed enigmatically, "and I prefer your kind. You are more natural; they have assumed the veneer of Society polish. It is quite enjoyable to have a chat with you!"

If I had been more of a woman of the world, I should have seen more in his words than I did. I remembered that we had chatted on two or three subjects which some people call "deep" or "learned," and I could scarcely conceive that others had not studied in the same way. I glanced at him, for I was looking down at that moment, and the expression which I saw on his handsome face made me tremble.

At that very instant our conversation was interrupted. Mr. Morris came up with Miss Irene Hartford, and I was introduced to that other person who, with Clifford, was to play such an important part in my life story.

"I have brought your partner safely to you, Hazeldene, and I have come to claim mine!" said Morris genially.

I remembered that I was engaged to him for the next dance, and I understood that Miss Irene Hartford was Clifford's partner for that same dance. I experienced a sensation of envy, almost resentment, at the thought.

The next instant I was being introduced by Clifford Hazeldene to Miss Hartford. I thought that she was a lovely girl, almost queenly in her appearance. What chance had I against such an one? And yet—he had not followed her like a shadow, as he might have been expected to do! Any man might have been excused for falling in love with her at first sight!

Miss Hartford was charming and talked vivaciously, but the strains of the music sent us hurrying to our places.

I saw Clifford again that evening, and the few moments spent with him were full of ineffable delight. When I found myself in my room, after the departure of the guests, I asked myself what was the strange feeling at my heart, and the answer was a thrill that caused me to sink into a chair and clasp my hands to my heart to still its wild throbbing. I loved Clifford Hazeldene! I tried to tell myself that I was mistaken, that I did not know what love meant; but my heart cried out against such an answer. I knew that I was in love. Oh, the joy of it! Only those who have loved can realise the full significance of Tennyson's words, that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all! I have gone through the sorrow of it since then; that sorrow would never have come to me but for my having loved; yet I would not alter it if I could, for then I should never have experienced that joy of loving!

He sought me out after that evening; he called to see Lady Thornhill and myself, and if he found me alone he was not displeased. We saw him at social gatherings, and he was always at my side as much as he could be.

I, too, looked for him and the day that passed without my seeing him was not a really happy one. I saw Lady Thornhill gazing at me curiously when she thought I was not observing her, but I understood that she viewed the course of events with approval. I scarcely dared believe that Clifford was in love with me—poor me! Yet there was no other explanation, and I was so happy!

So happy! Stay! Was it really so? There were times when a feeling of dread made me uneasy, and the cause of that sensation was Miss Hartford. She fell into the habit of calling to see dear Lady Thornhill; she was always very charming and affable, but I fancied that there was a strange glitter in her cold, grey eyes when she spoke to me. I felt as I imagine a bird must feel when fascinated by the gaze of a serpent! Instinctively I began to suspect some design on my happiness.

Lady Thornhill was fascinated by the beautiful Miss Hartford; she pressed invitations on her. This was not to my liking, but there was no help for it. It spoilt my pleasant chats with Clifford, for she was so often there, and he was obliged to devote part of his time to her.

As often happens in such circumstances, the climax came quickly. I heard Miss Hartford's name coupled with that of Clifford Hazeldene; it was hinted that their frequent visits to the Grange were not without object. People had long thought that something might happen in that direction, so ran the gossip, and an interesting announcement might be expected at any time!

That rumour stabbed me to the heart, and it made me rebellious; why was I forgotten? Did nobody see anything in *me?*

I was cool in my bearing towards Clifford that evening, for it had occurred to me that I might, after all, have been mistaken. He seemed puzzled, and asked me to walk through the garden with him. I was about to refuse, but the look on his face changed the refusal into acceptance. He conducted me to a small bower, where we seated ourselves.

"What is the matter, Ivy?" he asked softly. "Why are you treating me so coldly?"

I tried to look boldly at him, but—— Poor, foolish me! I could not withstand that ardent gaze, and my eyes dropped in confusion, although I stammered, in a despairing attempt to resist. "I do not see why I should treat you with any extra warmth, Mr. Hazeldene!"

"Now, Ivy, you do not mean that! I know you do not, because your face contradicts your tongue! And you must call me Clifford!"

He took my unresisting hands in his; he bent nearer; but I would not lift my face—nay, my head sank lower.

"You cannot have been blind to the object of my visits, Ivy! See, I call you by that name. And I want you to give me the right to do so; I have acted the usurper in doing so hitherto, but now I ask for the right."

There was a depth of passion in his low tones which made my head sink a little lower, a little nearer to his breast. I knew what he meant, but I could not reply.

"I want you to tell me that you will be——" he began, but the sentence was interrupted by the sound of another voice.

"What a delightful place this is!" It was Irene Hartford's voice, and it seemed to transform the heat of summer into the frost of winter. "I hope I am not intruding, but Lady Thornhill wished to see Miss Deane, and I volunteered to find her. Oh, dear!" she sighed, as she dropped into the seat from which I had hastily risen. "I feel quite fatigued, and I must really stay here for a minute or two. Isn't it charming, Mr. Hazeldene?"

Clifford was bound to reply, and I ran off alone. As I ran along I recovered from my confusion, and I thought I saw things more clearly. That was some ruse of Irene Hartford's part. How long had she been there? How much had she overheard?

A swift expression of surprise passed over Lady Thornhill's face when I told her that I had come in obedience to her request, conveyed by Miss Hartford, but she said smoothly: "It was nothing important, but now that you are here, I wish you would do——" And then she mentioned some trifling thing which I have forgotten.

So Irene Hartford had robbed me of the full enjoyment of the sweetest moment in a woman's life! Clifford would repeat the proposal at the next opportunity, but it would not be the same.

They came in a few minutes later; Clifford was white,

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and I guessed that he was very angry at the interruption, while Irene Hartford was calm and equable. She spoke with unruffled serenity, but I detected a gleam of triumph in those grey eyes, and I felt revengeful.

Clifford surprised us by saying that he could not stay to take tea. He took leave of us; his leave-taking was very formal with me, but I understood why, or thought I did, and was content to wait for our next meeting. Then Clifford Hazeldene went—and he went for good!

I waited in vain for him on the following day, and the morning of the second day brought me intelligence which dazed me. Clifford had left Mayton and gone to London. I waited for some sign from him, waited with a sickening fear gnawing at my heart, but not a word reached me.

Irene Hartford called again on the third day; she was as queenly as ever. She came, as I learnt later, with the set purpose of dealing me the final stab.

"I dare say you were surprised, dear Lady Thornhill, that Mr. Hazeldene went to London so quickly?" she asked sweetly. "Well, I have a little secret to tell you. Our engagement is to be announced shortly, and our marriage will take place as quickly as the necessary arrangements will permit. It is to accelerate those arrangements that he went off."

Why should I dwell on those terrible moments? I shudder even when I think of them! I remember that I preserved a calm demeanour by a tremendous effort, in order to rob Irene of as much of her triumph as I could, but—oh!—the agony of it! After she was gone I became ill, and it was two months later when I was able to get about a little and was strong enough to be taken abroad by dear Lady Thornhill. I had brain fever, they tell me. Clifford and Irene were married in that blank interval. I resolved to make my home in the quiet Swiss village whither Lady Thornhill conducted me, and I am still here. Lady Thornhill, who knows all, comes to live here for some months in the year, and life passes without much excitement. I can do much good here, and in relieving the troubles of others I contrive to partly forget my own.

I had been here two years when I ventured on a journey to Zurich to spend a fortnight with Lady Thornhill at the Hotel du Lac. It was nearly a week after my arrival; it was a warm afternoon, and Lady Thornhill preferred to enjoy a siesta, while I took a walk in the direction of Worishoeen. I was thinking deeply as I walked along with a quick step, unmindful of the scenery, and I blundered against a man. I began to apologise hurriedly in English, forgetting where I was, but the words froze on my lips. It was Clifford Hazeldene!

"Ivy!" he exclaimed hoarsely. How ill and weary he looked! "Ivy, you here?"

I was on the point of asking him frigidly by what right he used my Christian name, but the unutterable weariness of his countenance stopped the words. The pang that went through me told me plainly what I had tried to persuade myself was false; it told me that I loved him as madly as ever. How strange is love! In that one moment I understood that all the hard thoughts concerning his perfidy had been unjust; as I stood facing him, I knew that he was loyal and true. I recognised that appearances were dead against him, but I no longer believed in them.

"Ivy!" he said again, more calmly this time. "Yes, I am glad that we have met. Come with me, just there, where we can talk unobserved, and I will tell you all."

Involuntarily I walked with him to a secluded spot, away from the road, where we stood facing one another. His weary face betrayed his agony, but he did not waver as he spoke.

"It is a miserable story, and it proves how—— No! I will pass no comment on the woman who bears my name, I will set forth facts.

"After you left us in the bower, sent away by a subterfuge, Irene laid down her plan with fiend—with deliberation, I mean," he said abruptly, adhering to his resolve and checking his involuntary slip. "She told me that I should never marry you, for she would prevent it. I rose to my feet to put an end to the interview, but she sprang to her feet and barred the exit.

"With a deliberate coolness which you cannot conceive, Ivy, she stated her plan.

"'I've made up my mind that you shall marry me,' she said, 'and I will force you to do so. You pretended to love me once, and I have a letter from you. I shall use that letter if you do not agree to my proposition. That letter will not do much of itself, but it will support other statements which I shall make, and cause them to look genuine!'

"After that outburst, Ivy, she told me that if I were once more seen with you, she would spread a horrible report that would blacken your fair name and mine as well; then she threatened to do it if I did not marry her as well as give you up. She gave me some details of her terrible plot, and I shuddered as I recognised how easily the lies would be believed, because they were so plausible. The world is naturally inclined to judge harshly, Ivy! I tried to find a way out, but I saw none.

"I left the Grange. Irene gave me no time. I was forced to announce our engagement, to save your good name and my own. I wondered that Irene should push it so far as to insist on my marrying her, but I found out. It was to prevent any possibility of union between us, and it was because, in her own peculiar way, she loved me. I was fascinated by her at one time, and I wrote an innocent letter to her, but the madness wore off as soon as that letter was posted.

"We were married and I left her. But she would have me near her; she is the more jealous of me because she has been unable to make me love her in spite of all her attempts. She worships me, I know, but my love is not for her.

"That is all, Ivy! It may cause you to think less harshly of me, and I repeat that I did it to save you, although you may think me a weak fool!"

What reply could I make? Some words, I know not what they were, surged to my lips, but Clifford clutched my arm and I followed his gaze. Irene was standing before us, a mocking smile on her lips, a wicked gleam in the grey eyes.

"So the old play is being acted!" she sneered. "So this is why Miss Deane lives in Switzerland, and why my husband wishes to live away from his own estate. I am sorry to spoil the play. It is a comedy, but it may turn to a tragedy! I think I now have very good proof of a statement I made some time ago, and I may as well make the world fully acquainted with the facts."

With those words she turned on her heel and walked away. I had expected her to make an attack on me bodily, for her usual calmness had vanished by the time she had finished, and her face was distorted.

Clifford and I separated, after he had assured me that he would do everything to prevent the execution of the threat and to shield me.

I heard indirectly that Irene was taken suddenly with influenza, followed by pneumonia, and that her husband attended her assiduously; perhaps that saved me. At any rate, I heard no more, although it was months before I dared to feel safe.

And so another period of more than two years passed. I am happier in the knowledge of Clifford's loyalty, but my heart was heavy for him.

And now, this morning, I receive a telegram signed "Thornhill," and it tells me that Irene has met with a fatal accident in the Alps. She was picked up dead.

I grieve for her untimely end, and yet—I cannot repress the feeling of happiness that comes over me despite my efforts to check it, for I know that at some future time Clifford will come to find me. Am I wicked? Will someone guide me aright?

Geo. Day.

SHE: "And what would you be now if it weren't for my money?" He: "A bachelor."

HE: "Her hair is like sunshine:" She: "Ye-es; it's brighter some days than others."

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A Race for a Rose.

Explaining What the Winner Won.

For pleasant anticipation, meagre realisation, flirtation, and perspiration, nothing can excel a midsummer picnic.

The picnic, like the circus, usually succeeds in breaking our last year's vows never again to attend it, cajoles us into a faint belief that we are to be entertained, and sends us home with a foolish irritating sense that we ought to have known better.

The last picnic I was allured into was so dreadfully genteel that, for once, I looked forward from the start to a dreary eight hours of refined and wearisome tranquility. It was conducted in the most perfect manner possible.

Two large open brakes, under matronly supervision, and under the protection of several male exquisites, bowled away to the grounds, carrying many pretty girls, in the most stylish picnic dresses imaginable. There was no unbecoming hilarity on the way out; and during the period before dinner, no tree-climbing, hat-decorating, or other excitement after we arrived.

The dinner arrangements were entirely too systematic. I thought, as I watched the caterer opening his neatly-arranged bundles and baskets, of the picnic dinners I had assisted at in my less dignified days.

I remembered one in particular, where we had enough cake to make a good-sized regiment ill, enough salad eggs to ballast a yacht with, and enough potatoes to satisfy a dozen Irishmen; and I remember quite vividly that on this particular picnic we had nothing but empty dishes to carry home. Such is the marvellous vigour and capacity of a juvenile appetite!

I anticipated that the beautiful monotony of the occasion would prevail throughout the day, but I was agreeably disappointed.

As the luncheon hour approached the gentlemen began to arrive, some in carriages, a few on horses, and finally a party of gentlemen on splendid bicycles. The latter caused no little excitement by their appearance thus, and they occasioned considerable disgusted envy among those who had chosen less athletic means of transportation.

The bicyclists were heroes, and they were sublimely conscious of it. They strutted back and forth importantly, or exhibited their skill to an admiring and amused feminine audience, or else lounged in studied attitudes wherever they could command the exclusive attention of some credulous girl.

Among them were two gentlemen who made me the object of much attention, not because of any intrinsic merit of my own, but because I was honoured with the friendship of the coldest and most exclusive heiress in "our set." The fact that Rosalind Brewster had selected me for an intimate friend and companion was quite as unaccountable to me as to anyone else; but the gentlemen referred to wisely refrained from speculating upon the nature of our friendship, and accepted me as the only means of reaching Rosalind's interest

It was evident to me that they were both deeply fascinated by her personal and financial charms, and that their peculiar relations with each other must inevitably bring about a "little unpleasantness."

Mr. Curtis was a gentleman born—that is, he was born in a family which had for some years been established in the best of Society; he had been abroad, had dissipated a fortune or two, and was rather lionised by a fast set of young gentlemen.

His guest, Mr. Henry Sedley, was a young Scotsman who had entertained Curtis some months in the North, and who had been South just long enough to appreciate the attractiveness of Southern girls.

Neither gentleman had made Miss Brewster the object of marked attention, partly out of respect for her, and partly because she would not permit it. The strange girl had a heart, and a good one, too, but she had thrown such a wall of suspicious reserve about it, that it was not generally believed in.

Both gentlemen had laughingly accused me of robbing Miss Brewster of all the warmth of sentiment she possessed, and Mr. Curtis boldly announced his belief that she was incapable of any depth of feeling.

Remembering these remarks, and prompted somewhat by a curiosity to ascertain where her choice lay between these two most persistent admirers, I rallied her myself upon her frigidity, and had the gratification at this memorable picnic of seeing her welcome both with unusual cordiality.

They were both charming men. Mr. Curtis was more dignified and had a readier tongue, but the Scottish gentleman made up in good nature whatever he lacked in wit, and in fine physique whatever he lacked in dignity. I had no choice between them, and I sometimes think she had none; but the event which seemed to decide her was so trifling, considering that it shaped the course of two human lives, and her choice was so persistent and true, that I, at other times, think it was made before she entirely realised it.

After dinner we four adjourned to a snug little summer-house on the shady side of the hill, and here indulged in the lightest gossip and Society common talk. Miss Brewster, being in a talkative mood, received the stock jokes and stories of Messrs. Curtis and Sedley, which, on ordinary occasions, were poured into my phonographic ear to be ground out to her afterwards; and I, being in the dispiriting position of a social necessity—a mere convenience as it were—without even the compensation of second-handed attention, very naturally pined. I yawned surreptitiously behind my hand several times, became bolder and blinked openly, and finally dropped comfortably off into an afternoon nap.

In this interesting state I remained possibly an hour—probably ten minutes—and, upon awakening, found that my spiritual absence from the party had excited no attention whatever.

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In fact, my existence was so supremely disregarded, that Mr. Curtis, in the temporary absence of his friend, was boldly offering his hand and heart to Rosalind. I was tempted to be honourable—to reveal to these young people that I still lived; but the thought of interfering with the first proposal Rosalind had ever received restrained me, and I let well enough alone.

He said earnestly:

"I realise that you have never thought of the matter, and you have probably never thought of me. I have no desire to intrude upon you in *any* sense, but you should know, at least, when and where you have inspired love. You should know that you are loved, even if you are untouched by any feeling yourself. Do not think that I spoke with any hope of winning you, Miss Brewster, for I have always believed you heartless."

"You are unkind, Mr. Curtis," she said reproachfully.

"I presume I am," he exclaimed, in a despairing sort of way. "I do not mean to be, however; I do not mean to give any such return for your gracious treatment of me; but your unfavourable reply has made me forget myself."

"I gave you no answer," she said gently. "You surprised me into silence. I have never suspected that you—that you or any other gentleman cared for me."

She blushed painfully and hung her head like a shy Society "bud," rather than like a well-trained *habituée* of three seasons.

While matters were thus—his indecision proceeding from necessity, and hers from choice—there came an interruption in the shape of a delegation from the main body of picnickers.

As I knew that attention would quickly be directed to me, I very promptly closed my eyes, and assumed the serene and amiable expression of one who dreams with an easy conscience.

Rosalind, who did not wish to be found guilty of a *tête-a-tête* with Mr. Curtis, came hastily over to where I was slumbering, and, without much difficulty called me back to life and propriety. I calmly yawned in her face, while the delegation informed us that Mr. Curtis was wanted to take part in an open bicycle race in the glen below.

The young gentleman declined on the ground that he was he only racing-man in the party, and that his presence in the contest would not only interfere with its being a closely contested one, but would discourage many from entering. This statement was, however, taken exception to by his friend, Sedley, and he was obliged then to accept the situation and the implied challenge.

THE HUNTING GIRL

We found upon returning to the grounds, that Mr. Curtis had acted more wisely in declining than we had given him credit for. As soon as it became know that he would participate, the contestants rapidly evaporated, until the list contained only his name and that of his friend Sedley. Their friendly rivalry on the "wheel" had never assumed the proportions of a race, and as opinion seemed to be quite evenly divided as to their capabilities for speed, the interest excited soon became greater than if a promiscuous scramble for first place had been in prospect.

A course was chosen so as to give us a good view of the start, it led up the road for about a half mile to a broad turning place, and had for a homestretch the smooth piece of turf directly in front of the grounds.

Neither Sedley nor Curtis made any preparation other than a careful examination of his machine, but the starters, timers, and judges were organised in the most elaborate style imaginable. To cap the climax of general interest and Rosalind's nervousness, I suggested that she might stand on a provision basket at the finish, and, as the winner passed her, hand him the rose she wore on her bosom.

This idea was taken up with the greatest of enthusiasm, and, in spite of her protestations, she was obliged to accept the position.

She accordingly took the place assigned her, and although she stood upon a very inappropriate pedestal, her statuesque grace and dignity commanded the admiration of those who ordinarily granted her only respect.

Realising that she must feel exceedingly nervous, I stood by her side and enrolled the services of a young student to assist in keeping up her courage.

As Messrs. Sedley and Curtis slowly passed by her on their way to the starting place, they politely doffed their caps, and I could plainly see in the latter's pale and excited face, and in the determined expression upon the young Scotsman's countenance that the race would be bitterly contested.

The young student informed us that it would be a "close thing, as Curtis had a fine record and Sedley was in beautiful condition." He also informed us that both men had expressed their determination to win at any cost, and that several of the party had quietly staked considerable money on the result. These remarks did not contribute at all to Rosalind's peace of mind, as they added to the sense of responsibility she already felt weighed down with. When everything was in readiness, two gentlemen held the bicycles in position, while a third, after giving a few instructions, said, promptly:

"Are you ready? Go!"

They went at first with the only impulse received from the starters, but quickening wonderfully at every push on the pedals, until they sped swiftly up the road almost hub to hub.

The student eyed them critically through an exquisite eyeglass until they passed from sight, and then turning to us, said:

"There is no nonsense in these mile sprints. Now, on a five or ten mile course, a man can save himself and win; but on a dash like this, you know, a man must put in from the start for all he is worth."

"Is there any danger?" Rosalind asked, nervously unfastening the flower on her bosom.

He shook his head in an ominous manner, saying.

"Racing doesn't kill men, but it uses them up terribly. I wouldn't be surprised to see them both completely winded."

After a brief period of time, Rosalind's anxiety was quickened by a movement among those who were further up the road, indicating the approach of the two cyclists. In a few seconds more they appeared round a bend in the road, and headed directly for us. The Scotsman was bending dangerously far over the handles, but was riding in a line as straight as an arrow's flight, while Mr. Curtis, although he sat erect, and appeared from his square shoulders and rigid arms to be exerting himself magnificently, was swaying violently from side to side, and was evidently losing ground. Suddenly, as they neared us, his pace slackened, and then he was seen to tumble headlong upon the turf.

Sedley came swiftly on, his face and eyes beaming with excitement and triumph, and dexterously caught the coveted flower from Rosalind's extended hand. As soon as he had passed, he wheeled around and was among the first to reach his unfortunate friend. The latter lay quite still for a few moments, much to our alarm; but as we approached, Mr. Sedley raised him gently from the ground, and in response to his inquiry, "Are you hurt, old man?" received a reply in the

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negative, so gruff and coarse that we felt no further apprehension.

The young Scotsman apparently did not notice this rudeness, for he gracefully placed the rose in his friend's hand, saying:

"I am content to have won the race. The rose is yours by virtue of your pluck and fair play."

Curtis drew away from Sedley and, flinging down the flower, said, angrily:

"If you content yourself with a victory so ill-gotten, you are welcome to the spoils."

"You don't mean to accuse me of unfairness?" Sedley asked gravely.

Curtis hesitated for a moment, and then, looking at his friend sullenly, said:

"Well, what else can I do?"

Sedley returned his glance with one of reproach, but said, coolly:

"I regret that you take such a view of it; you are certainly mistaken."

Rosalind picked up the slighted flower, and, fastening it upon Mr. Sedley's coat, said spiritedly:

"You have won this fairly, and by your magnanimous conduct, you have won it doubly."

There was a murmur of approbation audible, and Mr. Curtis, feeling that he was without sympathy, picked up his bike and walked angrily away.

As Sedley wheeled his bicycle slowly back to the grounds, Rosalind walked at his side, the student and I following.

The latter, who had been blazing with indignation from the crown of his little straw hat down to his patent-leather boots, exclaimed, rather loudly:

"The coward! He fell because he couldn't win!"

"It is not as bad as that," I said.

"You are no judge," he said, with characteristic effrontery. "I saw him put on the brake the moment he knew that the race was lost. He pulled up, and then took his time about falling. I tell you the fellow is a coward!"

My eloquent escort then launched out into an extensive dissertation upon the ethics of racing; and, encouraged by my silence, he talked himself into a mild form of bronchitis.

Under the cover of his conversation, I listened to that of Rosalind and her Orlando. She said:

"You evidently did not place a very high estimate upon my rose, since you were so willing to part with it."

"I see that you are unwilling, after all, to credit me with the sacrifice I made," he answered. "I should think that my hard struggle for its possession ought to convince you that I valued it highly; but it is just as well that you should not understand either my eagerness to win, or my motives afterwards in presenting *him* with the flower."

He was treading upon dangerous ground, and Miss Brewster, realising it, changed the subject skilfully.

"Will you do me a great favour?" she asked.

"With pleasure!" he replied unhesitatingly.

"It is that you forgive Mr. Curtis. I am glad that you have committed yourself in advance, for I am thus assured that he will be pardoned."

"You are taking advantage of my willingness to oblige you," he said gravely.

"I know that I am," she acknowledged, "and it is unfair in me to do so; but I feel that Mr. Curtis did not mean what he said—that he was betrayed by his chagrin and his temper to harsh words which he will afterwards deeply regret."

"You plead his cause eloquently," Sedley observed. "Such warm friendship is worth losing the race for."

She blushed slightly and said in a lower tone:

"I am perhaps going too far in my attempts to make peace. I am presuming upon your friendship."

"You are acting from the kindest motives, I know," he said, warmly; "but you are asking me to sacrifice my pride to his ill-temper, as severe a humiliation as you could impose upon me. As a proof of what I would do for you, I pardon him. I accept the inglorious position you wish me to take, but I cannot further accept of his hospitality. I shall leave for home at the earliest opportunity, satisfied that I should never have come."

He had laid aside his bicycle, and as they strolled on, Rosalind took his arm. He was a tall, solidly-built fellow, and she a slender, delicate girl, hence there was something in this silent expression of dependence which touched him. He said:

"I know that it is ungenerous of me to talk thus to you; but when a man acts as he has today—openly insults his guest—and the lady I most respect exonerates him, and even asks me to bow to his insolence, I feel somewhat disagreeable."

THE HOCKEY GIRL.

As my escort stopped while they went on, I heard no more; but I noted as I watched them that his manner seemed to grow less aggressive and hers more interested. They passed on slowly out of sight, while I, like a good girl, allowed them the freedom they were both lungering for, and at the same time impressed my young student with the idea that I was a "fearfully clever girl, you know," by listening with mummy-like attention to his collegial yarns.

I felt that the revelations of the day should greatly influence Rosalind in choosing between the two men, and reflected with no little satisfaction that if she did not succeed in patching up a peace between them, she would soon have to avow publicly a preference for one or the other.

"It's too bad that this business should end so unpleasantly," said my friend, relapsing into a live topic, "Curtis has ruined his own reputation and spoilt the visit of his guest. Sedley will go as soon as he can pack, and I don't blame him."

"He won't go," I said confidently. "I am willing to bet a pair of gloves that he will remain a month or more."

"I take you—that is to say, the bet," he responded with spirit.

* * * * *

The Rose was won, but not before the wager was. As I write there lies near me on the table a pair of long Bernhardt gloves of spotless white. I have been tempted to use them more than once, but at the giver's suggestion I am reserving them for Mr. Sedley's wedding, at which I am to be honoured with the office of first bridesmaid.

Madeleine Maurey.

WIDOW (tearfully): "Yes, my daughters are now my only resources." Friend: "Take my advice, and husband your resources well."

JACK: "I proceed to Nellie Sweetlyps last night, and——" Ned: "I know just when it happened. I saw you holding her hand when you did it." Jack: "You're mistaken; I wasn't holding her hand. She was feeling my pulse to see if my heart was really beating as fast as I said it was."

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

II.—THE MISTAKE OF MILLICENT HOWARD.

MILLICENT HOWARD was looking radiantly beautiful. Everyone agreed in that, and all, except one or two men biassed in favour of *fiancées*, acknowledged she was the loveliest girl at the ball.

Beautiful by nature, beautifully dressed, and a fairylike dancer, she was naturally engaged for every dance as soon as she appeared, and George Poole, her devoted admirer since childhood, was unable to obtain more than two valses to his name. How it happened that Graham Parker, who came after him was able to get the three for which he boldly asked, is a mystery only to be explained by a girl at a dance.

"Now," she said gaily, as Graham came up to claim his first dance, "this is number ten on the programme, so you may rest assured that I have already assented nine times to the statements that the room is hot, the floor perfection, the band charming, and, in general, the ball a great success, so those subjects are taboo."

"Well," he said as he placed her hand on his arm and they slowly began to valse, "may I say that the one thing more perfect than the floor, more charming than the band, and *the* success of the ball, is Miss Millicent Howard? Or are you tired of hearing that also?"

Millicent blushed brightly, but she turned off the compliment with a laugh. It was perhaps a little laboured, but she did not notice it, she was too perfectly happy at that moment to pick holes in anything, least of all in anything he should say to her.

They paused to rest a moment near where George was pulling his moustache in some natural jealousy at the undisguised happiness shining in Millicent's eyes.

Suddenly the electric light went out, and the brilliant scene was plunged in darkness. A hush, a stifled scream, and then girlish laughter and excited talk.

Then, piercing the darkness, a cry of "Fire!"

Instantly the room was a seething mass of human creatures fighting for their lives.

Someone cried out:

"For Heaven's sake go quietly, and all will be well!"

But in vain, the terrifying darkness and the smell of smoke, which grew more and more perceptible, seemed to have maddened everyone, and they fought almost like wild beasts to reach the doorway.

At the first alarm George had rushed to Millicent's side, and finding Graham had evidently been torn from her side in the rush, and hearing her cry piteously:

"Oh, please, where are you? I can't see anything, and I am squeezed up in this corner and can't move." he called out, "Miss Howard—Millicent—I am here and will take care of you. Trust yourself to me."

And soon she was clinging convulsively to his arm, trembling and almost fainting.

Love and peril taught George, quiet, unassuming George, the very last person Nature had meant for a hero, what to do.

"Millicent," he said sternly, "you must not faint, you would be trampled to death at once. Pull yourself together *directly*, and do what I tell you."

The authoritative tone roused her for the time at any rate, she fought bravely with the feeling of faintness and suffocation, and put it from her.

George found that behind him was a heavy velvet settee firmly fixed against the wall, so with some difficulty he scrambled on to that, and, bending over her, said:

"Now, put your arms round my neck, and I will draw you up out of the crush on to this place, where you will be out of immediate danger."

Obediently she locked her arms round his neck, while he clasped his round her slender waist, and, with a mighty effort, which seemed almost to crack the sinews of his back, he drew her out of the struggling mass of men and women.

The touch of her bare arms, the sweet warm weight of her lissom body in his arms filled him with a rush of joy no danger could quench, and holding her closely to him he murmured in her ear:

"This is a heaven worth going through much to obtain. Oh, Millicent, Millicent, if you knew how I love you! Let me die at this moment if you can never have love for me."

But Millicent hung in his arms a dead weight, he hardly knew whether she had heard his wild words or not, only fancied the clasp of her arms grew slightly closer, and, as his heart throbbed madly at the thought, he bent over her drooping head and caught the words—

"I love——" But then there was silence and he knew she had fainted, this time in real earnest.

For the first time George felt the desire to save his own life also. Hitherto his only thought had been of her, now he felt that life held possibilities of a joy he had hardly dreamt of, and it would be very bitter to lose it.

The firemen had arrived; the cries of the strong, the groans of the weaker, who were trodden under foot or crushed against walls, were growing less, some people had succeeded in getting out, and the work of rescue was being carried on as systematically as possible. Suddenly the flames burst out in the roof, and a lurid light was cast upon the ghastly scene.

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George's one thought at that moment was—"Thank God she can't see that!"

Worse than the wrecked room, the dead or unconscious bodies of those who had been laughing and talking so gaily only an hour before, were the faces of the living, tortured out of all human resemblance in the agony of that wild fight for the life that they felt was beyond the narrow doorway.

Strong men working at the outside were knocking a hole in the wall of the building farthest from the door, but the flames were gaining apace, and the smoke was stifling.

Looking round desperately to find a means of escape for Millicent and himself from a terrible death, George saw the moment the wall fell where the men were working not far from him. Seizing her in his arms, he made his way as quickly as he could to the opening, staggering under his burden.

As he drew near, another portion of the wall, loosened by the fire, fell, and, bending over his precious burden to protect her, he yet managed to thrust her into the arms of the first smoke-begrimed form that emerged from the opening ere he fell, struck senseless by the falling bricks.

Graham Parker, his dress-suit torn, his hands bleeding from their labours, his face blackened, and his hair singed, carried the poor girl tenderly out of the burning building.

The fresh air outside seemed to revive her, and opening her lovely blue eyes, she smiled up at him with a look of ineffable content, and, he could almost have sworn, with undisguised love.

"You have saved my life," she murmured, and then, as she awoke to the fact that they were out in the lamp-lit road, and she was in his arms, "Oh, put me down, please, I can stand quite well."

But when she came to try she found she could not stand without assistance, so, with his arm supporting her, he led her to where her frantic father was anxiously scanning the faces of the victims as they were brought out, with a sickening fear of finding hers among them.

"Millicent—and alive!" he cried joyously. "Thank God! And you, too, young man," he added, peering into Graham's face. "I don't know if you are anyone I know, but please stay with her a minute while I get John to bring the carriage round to this side street," and he was gone in a moment.

For some minutes they stood in silence, Millicent making several ineffectual attempts to say something. At last it came out hurriedly as she saw her father with his head out of the brougham window calling directions to the coachman.

"Graham," in a sweet, hesitating voice, "I heard what you said in that awful place," with a shuddering glance behind her, "and I want to tell you that I do love you, and that I have always loved you ever since I have known you, and now you have saved my life I could not let you go away without telling you what only my silly faintness prevented me from saying at the time."

Bewildered with what he heard, Graham could only press her slight form to him, and found no words in which to reply.

The carriage was there, Millicent's father wrung his hand vehemently, thanking him earnestly for what he had done, and cutting short his protestations that he had done nothing. Then Graham helped the blushing, trembling girl into the carriage, and she drove off waving a white hand from the window, while he went back to continue his work of rescue with his heart throbbing, and his brain in a whirl from the problem that was thus set him to solve.

"Millicent loves me? What ought I to do? It is clear that poor old George saved her life and proposed to her in the dark, and it is equally clear that she thinks it is I who have done both. It is the most awful fix a man was ever in. If I let things go on and say nothing, I am playing an awfully mean trick on George, who is my friend, and altogether sailing under false colours, and if I tell her she is mistaken I refuse her love, and put her to the shame of having confessed a love that was never solicited. Good heavens, what ought I to do?"

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

LAST week's instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" concluded by leaving Miss Gillespie in a very perilous position, and this week readers will have the satisfaction of learning how she successfully escaped from her immediate danger, only, alas! to be led into another trap. Our "Sara" covers have been creating quite a stir, not only in those towns wherein the actual episodes occur but over the whole country.

NUMEROUS correspondents from everywhere in the British Isles have written to me concerning Miss Gillespie, and not a few of them ask the question, "Does a future episode happen in this town?"

Now I am sorry to say that I do not feel able to take you so far into my confidence as to tell you exactly where Sara gets driven to. Of course, many of you will perhaps be sorry to find that Sara did not penetrate into your immediate regions, but no doubt such of you will be consoled when you find that you are either personally acquainted with the places she does visit, and that any rate you have friends or relations there. I may state, however, that the scene of Sara's next thrilling escapade is the city of Birmingham.

FROM Liverpool I have received the following from "W. R. M." "We have formed a literary club here, and we think very highly of "SHORT STORIES." We take it in turns to read aloud to assembled club-ites a story from your bright little paper."

I am very pleased to learn that the members of this club have such a high opinion of SHORT STORIES, and I consider it a capital idea for one to read out the stories aloud. Now the long winter evenings are coming on, the club should flourish greatly, especially as I have some extra-special good matter in store for readers. Other clubs might do worse than follow the example of this Liverpool one, and I should like to hear if any do so.

ON the opposite page is another Unsolved Love Problem, entitled "The Mistake of Millicent Howard."

As in the case of "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements," the first of the series, which commenced last week, I am offering a prize of *one guinea* to the reader who sends in the most satisfactory solution to the problem.

The question which requires answering is this: "Should Graham Parker inform the girl of the true state of affairs, or not?"

Arguments, clearly stated, should not exceed one hundred words.

Replies must not reach these offices later than Friday, November 20th, and envelopes should have "Love Problem" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner.

ON pages 620 and 621, you will find two drawings depicting athletic young women. These are the first of a series, "The Girls of Great Britain," and I am sure you will find each picture interesting, and true to life.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

The sun was blazing hot, and there were scarcely any provisions left.

The other man was half dead, and Staunton remembers how he intended to kill him outright so that he should give no further trouble, when the boy hotly intervened.

"Put down that axe," he had cried; "it's murder!" He had lifted the axe and the boy had jumped at him. In doing so he had slipped and the weapon fell on his head!

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be.

Staunton's blood is Spanish, his father has been President of Peru, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton had told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death, in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

Don Ramiero guesses the position of affairs, and decides to hasten the removal of the man who might possibly do his master so much harm.

Wilfrid Ellerton, during the night, is, by a plea of ingenious trickery, on the Spaniard's part, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated on board the yacht that he had fallen overboard, and was drowned.

When Mercedes heard the news—the glibly spoken lie—she fell fainting to the deck, breathing words of delirious love.

Then Isolo Staunton understands that his daughter has given her heart to the man he has doomed to a living death!

He is furious at Valdez for hastening the action.

Mercedes lies at Death's door, attended to with the greatest possible care by the yacht's physician, Dr. Billaud.

In consequence of the alleged accident, the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé*, Captain Percy Iddison, have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton decides to go and break the news to Ellerton's father personally.

He orders Billaud to perform an operation on Ellerton, to see if it be possible to restore his memory. Should that prove to be impossible, his life should be spared, and he would be restored to Mercedes.

Thus it was decided that the captive on board the *Isola* should have just one chance for his liberty.

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TENTH CHAPTER.

Ellerton Recalls the Past.

WHILE the *Isola* was clearing the Firth of Forth both the Captain and the First Officer remained, according to custom, on the navigating bridge.

Captain René Durtal was a Corsican. A little over medium height, the breadth of his square shoulders and the size of his muscular limbs made him look rather under it if anything. Black-haired and bearded, with piercing steel-blue eyes, and strong features, he was a man much admired for his undoubted manliness and strength; but if his hair had been clipped close and his beard and moustache shaved off—as they once had been in the prison of Ile Nou, in New Caledonia, his admirers would have been not a little shocked at the result. The bluff, hearty, handsome sailor would not have been recognisable in the brutal assassin whose mis-shapen skull and animal features would thus have been revealed. His age was a few years under fifty.

His second in command was a tall Englishman of about thirty-four. He wore a heavy moustache and neatly-trimmed torpedo-beard which effectually concealed the tell-tale weakness of his mouth and chin, and even made him good-looking beyond the average of men.

His name on the books of the *Isola* was Herbert Darfield. Before he joined her it had been Arthur Culworth, which was the name of a second-officer on one of the crack Atlantic liners who had been arrested for fraud and conspiracy in connection with the disappearance of certain mails and specie at New York. He had been released on heavy bail found by his present skipper, whom he had never seen before, and as he vanished within an hour the bail was duly estreated.

Every responsible officer on board the *Isola* was a criminal of some sort, convicted or otherwise, bound to his employer by the fetters of his own crimes and the fear of their consequences, as well as by the golden links of self-interest. As a matter of fact they were Staunton's purchased slaves, but he had made them rich beyond the reach of temptation, and so no man was better or more faithfully served than he.

"When we are well out of sight of the land, Mr. Darfield," said the Captain, "you can let her have full speed ahead. You will, of course, keep as far away from everything you sight as possible, but, if you must pass something, don't forget to slow down as usual."

He said this in excellent English, but with a decided accent, which the lady guests on board the yacht were wont to find "very interesting." His lieutenant touched his cap—discipline under Staunton was almost as strict as under an Admiral of the Fleet—and said:

"Very good, sir. And when we are well outside I presume that we shall steer as straight a course as possible for the Anchorage?"

"Certainly, my friend," replied the skipper, for, outside the demands of discipline, they were excellent friends. "The Señor's instructions are that we shall arrive there with as little delay as possible. As you know, we have a very important consignment on board, and, moreover, we have to get the poor Señorita into the blue waters of the Mediterranean as fast as we shall dare to make the *Isola* travel."

"Now I will go to lunch," he went on, as he saw the land fading swiftly away into blue mist on either hand. "You have the course; north-east two hundred miles, then due north to the circle."

He touched his cap in polite response to his lieutenant's salute, and went down the ladder to join Don Ramiero and the doctor in the smoking-room for the inevitable cocktail.

Darfield began his watch by walking several times back and forth on the bridge, thinking over the singular events which had happened during the brief cruise.

Presently, looking aft as he turned at one end, he saw the tall figure of a woman dressed in nurse's costume coming towards the bridge. He, of course, knew that two nurses had been engaged at Edinburgh for Miss Staunton, but he had been on shore when they came on board. Since then they had been below with their charge, and so he had not seen them.

He took another turn, and when he got back she was nearly under the bridge. He looked down instinctively, and saw a pale, almost white face, with firm, regular features made beautiful by a pair of deep grey eyes, which shone softly under long black lashes. The broad, low forehead was fringed with bright chestnut ringlets, curling out from under the little, close bonnet.

As the eyes met his they seemed to dilate and darken as though they were gazing upon some fearful object suddenly encountered. The woman's form seemed to shrink smaller and shorter. Her head went back and her hands rose to her temples. Her lips parted slowly. A gasping sigh came from between them, and he heard the faintly-spoken, almost inarticulate words:

"Arthur! Good Heavens, what does this mean?"

The helmsman in the close-shut wheel-house looked out through the plate-glass wall and saw the First Officer go grey under his tan, reel back from the rail, and then clutch it again. His lips moved quickly and jerkily, and his eyes were staring wide-open at something on the promenade deck, which the helmsman could not see.

What the white trembling lips were saying was:

"Janet! My lost, good angel! Janet, my wife! Dead and alive again! So old Yuill lied after all, as I thought he did, the scoundrel! Janet here on the *Isola*—this vessel of crime! My God—what's going to happen now?"

The woman only heard the first few words. When he called her "wife" her eyes were blinded by a swift rush of tears; her breast heaved and shook with a sob that wouldn't be choked back. The air seemed to grow dark, and, driven by a sudden dread of fainting, Janet Culworth turned and went back with unsteady steps towards the companion-way.

So it was that the husband and wife whom the shadow of crime had divided, as they both believed for ever, met again—for better or worse.

For the next three days and nights the *Isola* sped eastward and northward, and finally due north at a speed that would have astonished even those who had seen her do her twenty-two knots along the Solent, for she was flinging the ocean leagues behind her now at thirty-five. Yet, tremendous as the speed was, so perfectly were her engines balanced in her hull, that she swirled along as easily over the smooth summer sea as though she had been travelling twelve or fifteen.

In physical health Mercedes had improved even more rapidly than Doctor Billaud had dared to hope, and already her mind was reawakening under the gentle and skilful treatment of her nurses. Indeed, he already began to see a prospect of giving her back to her father when he met the yacht, as had been arranged, at Monaco, completely restored, saving only, perhaps, that one possibility which he still feared and yet hoped against.

But for that "other patient" to whom he had so callously alluded during the memorable conversation in the Council Chamber, there was now but little more hope, if any, than for the felon condemned to the scaffold waiting his doom in the last of his earthly habitations, for the mission on which the *Isola* was now bound was the execution of the pitiless sentence passed upon him by the Lord of the Underworld, and every smooth pulsation of her engines was bearing him nearer to its mysterious portal. There was just one chance for him, and one only.

Wilfrid Ellerton had never been allowed to completely recover from the stupor into which he had been thrown by

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the drug which had been poured on the cloth over his head. He had had periods of half-awakening, during which he wondered vaguely where he was and what had happened. Now and then, too, visions of glorious bliss and exquisite loveliness, to which he could give neither definite form nor exact name, flitted through the mists which had somehow clouded all his mental horizon; but as to how or why the mists had come he had neither memory nor knowledge.

Don Ramiero and Doctor Billaud sat late over their coffee and cigars in the Council Chamber after dinner on the evening of the third day out from Leith. The subject of their conversation was just then coming slowly to his senses in a small, windowless cabin beneath the main deck, and almost immediately under the floor of the sanctum.

"And so, my dear Señor Valdez, you are still of opinion, even after all the arguments that I have adduced, that the course you propose to pursue is a wise one?" said the doctor, allowing the ash from his cigar to fall into a little silver tray.

"My dear doctor," replied Valdez, rather coldly, "it is not here a question of right or wrong, or wisdom or foolishness, it is a matter of obedience or disobedience to the commands of one who, as you know, has the power to punish—and who never forgives.

"You have performed the operation in accordance with the Señor's last orders when he left us. It was, as you know, his settled purpose to discover whether that piece of bone was pressing on the brain or not. You found that it was, and you have raised it. If you find that the operation has not restored to him the memory of certain occurrences which the Señor desires to be utterly forgotten, then it is our duty to arrange circumstances, if I may put it so, that they will fit in with his rescue as the sole survivor of the company of a fishing smack which had picked him up, and we had the misfortune to run down in the darkness. You are, of course, aware of the Señor's very pressing reasons for accomplishing this rescue if possible.

"Certainly," replied the other, "it is perhaps the one chance of escaping the commission of what some people would call a crime and possibly of restoring his daughter's complete reason and insuring her happiness. Laudable objects, I admit, but the risk is tremendous. It is always the unexpected that happens, and even an escape from the Underworld might, by some miracle, be made possible. No, no, with all due deference to the Señor, if that memory has come back to him, it is not safe for him to be alive *anywhere*. Much better to have left things as they were and put him below without any further trouble."

"You will pardon me, Doctor, if I remind you that that is not a question for us to decide. The Señor has already decided, and it only remains for us to carry out his orders," rejoined Valdez coldly. "Ah, there," he went on with sudden animation, as three gentle knocks sounded under the floor of the room, "your patient is ready for examination, I presume."

As he spoke he began to pull the loose carpet away from one of the corners. When a space of a couple of square yards had been bared he tapped three times on it with the toe of his boot. A section of the deck slid back in a groove. There was a slight sound as of the working of well-balanced machinery, and in a few moments Wilfrid Ellerton, seated in an armchair, appeared through the gap which was exactly filled by the rising platform on which the chair rested. His head was bandaged, and his face was that of a man who had narrowly escaped death after a long illness, but there was intelligence in the opening eyes with which he looked wonderingly round the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Ellerton," said Don Ramiero politely, and in sympathetic tones. "We, that is the Doctor and myself, are delighted to see you so far on the way to recovery after the serious injury occasioned by your fall. May I ask if you feel that your head is quite clear now?"

"Perfectly," replied Wilfrid in a weak but quite distinct voice; "the only thing I'm not quite clear about is that fall you speak about. Still, that doesn't matter now. So I've been *ill* some time, have I? Yet I seem to be still on board the yacht. The rest are still here, I suppose. If so I should very much like to see Mr. Staunton as soon as possible. I have something very important to say to him which I meant to say that evening when I had the accident."

"I am afraid," said Don Ramiero kindly, "that it will hardly be possible for you to see Mr. Staunton to-night. He is unwell. In fact he had to go to bed immediately after dinner. But in the morning, no doubt. And now as to your own health. Excuse a rather curious question, which I really ask on Mr. Staunton's behalf, for reasons which he will make plain to you later on, but do you find that your memory of past, somewhat long-past events, is any different from what it was before your accident?"

Wilfrid Ellerton answered the momentous question, on the reply to which, had he but known it, so much of life and happiness depended, with a low laugh, which made Doctor Billaud turn his head and give Valdez a quick, warning glance.

"Why, yes," he said. "That is rather a curious question, but the answer to it, I think, you'll find more curious yet. My memory is in that way most singularly better. Why, there are some things that I remember with perfect distinctness now which, for some reason or other, I had forgotten for years, and, what is more funny still, I remember now that I *had* forgotten them."

"That, my dear sir," said the Doctor in his soft, even voice, "is really most remarkable. You will, I am sure, pardon me if I seem to intrude upon your confidence, but my professional interest in the matter is so keen that I hope you will be able to accept it as an excuse."

"Certainly, Doctor," replied Ellerton good-naturedly. "I don't know of any reason why I shouldn't answer any question you like to ask about that sort of thing. What would you like to know?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ellerton," said Billaud in his suavest tone, "that is very kind of you. Well, in the first place, I should like to know in which period of your life occurred those forgotten events which you say you have just remembered; and at the same time, perhaps you would not object to giving me, just as a matter of professional interest, you know, some idea as to the nature of those events."

Ellerton looked down at the floor for a few moments and then his eyes wandered round the walls of the Council Chamber, dwelling here and there on the pictures hanging on the walls. One of them pictured a boy and a girl in a small boat on the sea.

It was the merest trifle, but it was enough to set the mechanism of his restored memory in motion. In a moment he was back amidst the long-forgotten horrors of the whale-boat, adrift on the wide Pacific. He began, and, like a man telling the story of a dream from which he has just awakened, so he told that story to his two eager and desperately interested listeners in such graphically lucid detail that it was little less than a reality to them while he was speaking.

He finished by saying in the most matter-of-fact tone:

"There, gentlemen, that is the thing that I had forgotten. Not the sort of thing a fellow would be likely to forget, is it?"

"And you feel quite certain, Mr. Ellerton," said Don Ramiero, after a little pause during which he and the Doctor had exchanged glances of sinister significance, "that this most interesting and thrilling experience was a real event in your earlier life, and that you actually do remember it as such?"

"Of course I do," he replied, with fatal candour, "why, the whole thing's as clear to me as though it had happened only yesterday; as, in fact, for some reason or other, it really seems to have done. I could tell you the names of the men in the boat with me, the ship we were wrecked in. Everything, in fact. I shall have quite a thrilling yarn to tell Mer—er—Miss Staunton and the other ladies after breakfast to-morrow."

"I have not the slightest doubt but that it will be as deeply interesting to them as it has been to Señor Valdez and myself. Really, Mr. Ellerton, I have to thank you for what I may call one of the most striking experiences of my pro-

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fessional career!" exclaimed Doctor Billaud with very real interest. "And now I must prescribe for you. A glass of wine with just a couple of drops of sedative in it, and then to bed again, please. A sound night's sleep and you will be quite ready to tell your marvellous story to the ladies in the morning."

"Thanks very much, Doctor," he said. "I do feel a bit fagged. By the way, I've forgotten to ask you what you have been doing to my head, and—and how the dickens I managed to get into this room?"

"All in good time, my dear sir," replied Billaud gently as he watched him drink the wine; "we must not trouble the head with too many details just yet; but I also shall have an interesting story to tell you later on."

While he was speaking Ellerton's head had drooped forward on to his chest, and the next minute he was fast asleep. Valdez tapped on the floor and the platform descended. Presently it came back empty.

"Well, Señor Valdez," said Billaud, "I think that is quite conclusive. Shall we descend?"

"We will," replied Don Ramiero; "he has pronounced his own doom."

Then, standing on the platform, they disappeared into the depths of the *Isola's* hold.

Valdez pulled aside the loose carpet and gave a signal. A section of the deck slid back in a groove. In a few moments Wilfrid Ellerton appeared through the gap, his head bandaged.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Physician and Nurse.

UNDER the floor of the Council Chamber there was another room of exactly the same size, but very different in its appointments. Its walls, ceiling and floor were of half-inch steel, painted a neutral grey. It was lighted by eight electric bulbs, two on each wall, and it was absolutely devoid of furniture with the present exception of the arm-chair in which the form of Wilfrid Ellerton was lying, huddled and limp, just as a lifeless body might have lain.

Its other occupants when Don Ramiero and Doctor Billaud descended on the platform were René Durtal and his First Officer, Herbert Darfield.

"And now, my dear Doctor," said Don Ramiero, as they stepped on to the floor of the room, "I must trouble you to make sure that your patient is quite unconscious, and then we will leave you free to visit your more important charge, who is, doubtless, by this time in need of your care."

The Frenchman turned quickly away to make his examination, and so they did not see the scowl on his brow, or the ugly twist of his ape-like lips which told of an anger amounting almost to fury, to which he dare not give expression. The suggestion was really an order, and he knew that he had to obey it without question. He would have given half, nay, all that he possessed to have remained in the room and seen what was about to be done with the unfortunate young fellow whom he had just drugged into insensibility; but that was forbidden, and he knew that if he made any difficulty about going, there would be no hesitation in removing him by force.

He was aware of the existence of that Underworld over which his master ruled with undisputed sway, but that was all. What it was in reality, or by what mysterious means it was reached from the world above the waters he no more knew than the firemen who fed the *Isola's* furnaces, and this was not the least of the causes of his secret, but ever-growing, hatred and jealousy of Don Ramiero.

Why should this Spaniard know secrets and possess powers with which he, the man of science who held the power of life and death in his hands, was not to be trusted? Well, he might learn for himself some day, and then—but for the present it was necessary to obey.

"Absolutely unconscious, my dear Señor Valdez," he said

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with gently smiling lips as he came back from the side of the chair; "he will remain as he is for fully two hours, which, I trust, will be long enough for your purpose. At the end of that time you will be good enough to give him hot brandy-and-water of moderate strength, first in teaspoonfuls, and then, when he can swallow it, as a draught. Within a quarter of an hour or so, he will be in full possession of his faculties, and in a week or so at the outside his physical health will be completely restored. And now I will act upon your suggestion and go."

"I am much obliged to you, Doctor," replied Don Ramiero smilingly. "I will come back with you, and let you out as you might have some difficulty with the doors."

The Frenchman had hard work to keep his lips smiling, for this was another very sore point with him. He had not even been trusted with the secret of the doors of the Council Chamber, and to such a fiercely jealous nature as his this silent lack of trust was infinitely worse than open insult would have been.

The rising platform carried them back, and as he was opening the doors, Don Ramiero said gently but with unmistakable meaning in his voice:

"That is the first time, I believe, my dear Doctor, that you have been in the lower chamber. Under the circumstances it was necessary that you should visit it. At the same time I think it well to inform you that the Señor does not wish it to be known that such a chamber exists. He has his own reasons for this, and I need hardly suggest to you that they are probably very weighty ones."

"My friend," replied the other, smiling and looking him frankly in the eyes, "whatever they are, it is not for me to question or even to inquire into them. Let me assure you that I remember nothing of what I have seen during the last half hour."

"That is exactly the reply that I should have expected from such discretion as yours, my dear Doctor Billaud," murmured Don Ramiero.

"Our friend is altogether too polite, and he is getting rather too much power into his hands," he said to himself as he closed the doors. "He must be watched. If he is not careful it may possibly be necessary to arrange for another of these regrettable accidents. No one is so necessary to the Señor as to be indespensible, my friend."

Meanwhile the Frenchman was saying in his soul as he went back to his own rooms:

"Why should that Spaniard be trusted with secrets which I may not know? If I am good enough for Staunton to trust with the reason, nay, the very life, of his daughter, am I not good enough also to know the secrets which Valdez knows? Does not this tyrant of ours know that the surest way to turn faithful servants into traitors is to distrust them while they are worthy of trust? Yet I will know some day, cost what it may, for knowledge is power, and power is the only thing worth having in this worst of all possible worlds."

No wonder Billaud's curiosity was deep and burning with regard to the happenings about to take place in the chamber below the Sanctum, for certainly nothing stranger had ever taken place either on the ocean or beneath it since men first went down to the sea in ships.

As soon as Don Ramiero had closed the double doors he went to the telephone and rang up the bridge where the Second Officer was in charge. The bell tinkled in answer, and he said:

"Have you picked up the buoy yet, Mr. Martin?"

"We have just got it with the searchlight, sir; we shall be fast within five minutes. Shall I ring you up again as soon as we are?"

"If you please, when you are quite ready. There is no immediate hurry," said Don Ramiero, hanging up the transmitter.

Almost at the same moment Doctor Billaud knocked softly at the door of the spacious state-room in which Mercede was lying, already in the first stage of convalescence. It was opened by the head nurse, the woman who had recognised the First Officer of the *Isola* as the man who had given her his name, and then disgraced it.

"Good evening, Miss Yuill," he said softly as he entered. "Ah, I see that our dear patient is sleeping very nicely. It is the best of signs. Yes, yes, we shall have her well, I hope by the time that we have exchanged these northern latitudes for the blue waters of the Mediterranean."

"Northern latitudes?" she echoed. "What do you mean, Doctor? I thought we were going straight from Leith to Monaco?"

"At the last moment our sailing orders were altered," he replied in a whisper, for he was now by the bedside and was feeling his patient's pulse with an almost imperceptible touch of his finger. "Have you not noticed how the temperature has fallen during the last twenty-four hours or so?"

"No," she murmured, remembering what had happened during her last walk on deck. "You see, we have been very busy, Miss Leven and I, and I am not a very good sailor; so what time I have had to spare I have spent lying down or else in the saloon."

"Quite so," he replied, with a keen look at her fair face and honest eyes; "but, my dear Miss Yuill, this will not do at all. With the work that you have to do, and will have to do for some days and nights to come, it is absolutely necessary that you should have fresh air and exercise. Yes, as Miss Staunton's physician, I must really insist upon it. You will, I am sure, oblige me by asking Miss Loven to relieve you at once, and then by taking a good half-hour's promenade on deck. I need hardly remind a lady of your experience that the perfect health of the nurse is often essential to the recovery of the patient."

His tone and manner meant even more than his words, and she felt that there was only one reply to them, and so, with a few murmured words of thanks for his consideration, she left the room.

"That is a woman of character," he said to himself when she had gone; "and if I can still read the human soul through the windows out of which it looks upon the world, she has seen sorrow very close to her, misery, perhaps. Yes, she has suffered, and therefore she should be able to help me. I shall be better here for the present. If she notices anything out of the way during her stroll most possibly she will consult me, and then we may be able to come to something like an understanding. A handsome woman, too, almost beautiful, indeed, and highly skilled—a perfect wife for a physician. Well, well, what nonsense I am talking! And your dear Elsie still serving her life-sentence in the Isle of Pines. Tut, tut, let us attend to business!"

At this moment there was a tap on the door and Miss Annie Leven, the second nurse, entered. She was an absolute contrast to Janet Yuill—dark-haired, rosy-cheeked, hazel-eyed, *petite* in figure and overflowing with health—a typical Scotch lassie.

Meanwhile Janet had reached the promenade deck. The wind was northerly, and she at once thought of the Doctor's words as she felt the keen nip of it on her face. The moon was down, but the sky was clear and gemmed with star-clusters as it only is in high northern latitudes.

After the first wandering glance and a moment's thought there was no doubt left in her mind as to the real meaning of that triangular patch of white far up in the midnight sky with the long, wavering lines hanging down from it. It was the summit of Mount Hekla, clothed with its glittering mantle of ice and snow, hung in mid-air under the star-shine more than five thousand feet above the smooth sea on whose surface the *Isola* was now lazily floating.

Yes, the yacht had stopped, and that was the snow-clad peak of Hekla, the great volcano of Iceland. It could not be anything else. She knew that it was the only mountain of such a height that could be seen from the surface of the North Sea.

What was the *Isola* doing here off the coast of Iceland,

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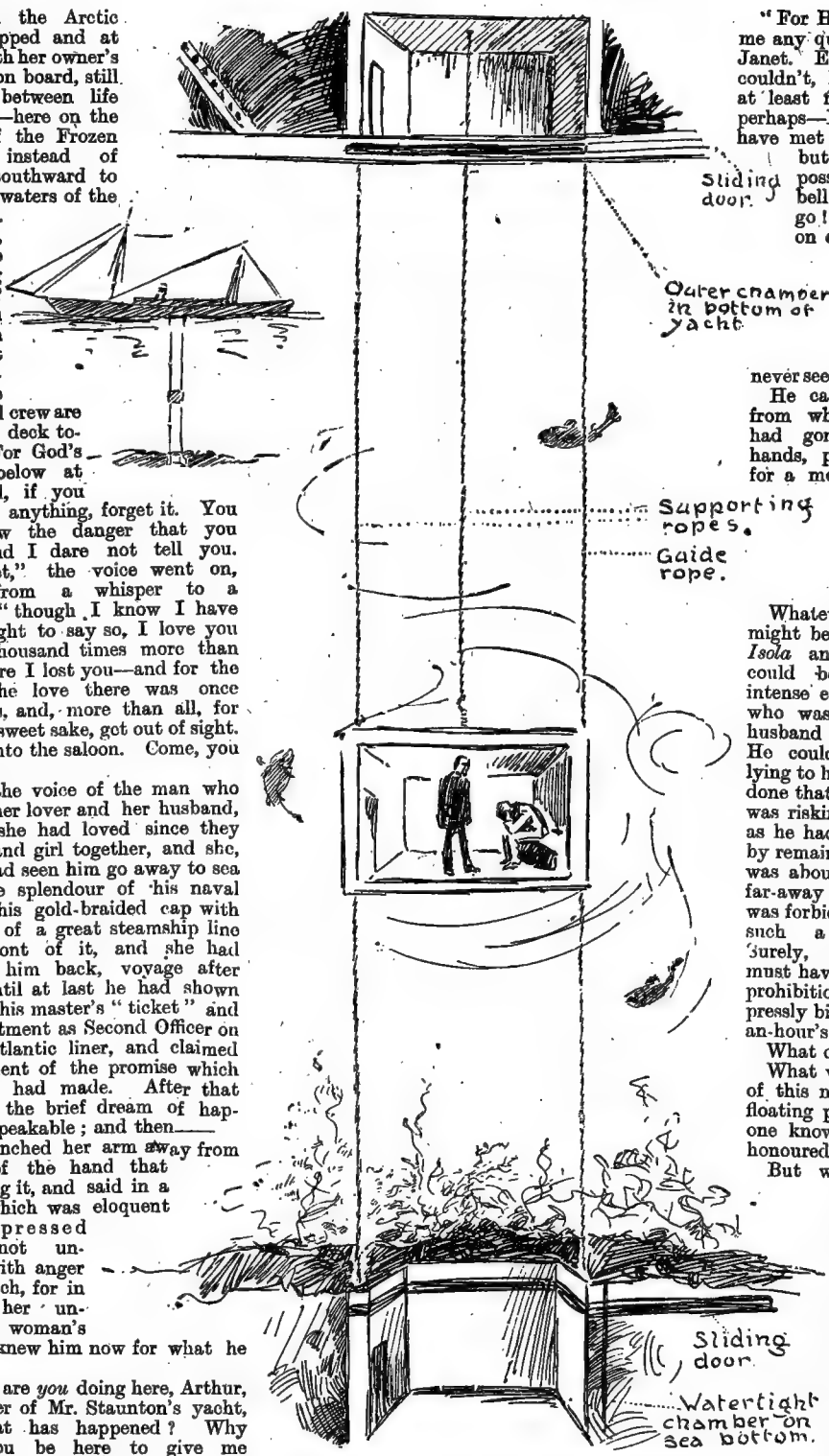
almost on the Arctic Circle, stopped and at anchor, with her owner's daughter on board, still wavering between life and death—here on the confines of the Frozen Ocean, instead of speeding southward to the sunny waters of the Inland Sea.

"Janet, what are you doing here? Have you not been told that no one except the officers and crew are allowed on deck to-night? For God's sake go below at once; and, if you have seen anything, forget it. You don't know the danger that you are in—and I dare not tell you. But, Janet," the voice went on, sinking from a whisper to a murmur, "though I know I have lost the right to say so, I love you more—a thousand times more than I did before I lost you—and for the sake of the love there was once between us, and, more than all, for your own sweet sake, get out of sight. Go back into the saloon. Come, you must!"

It was the voice of the man who had been her lover and her husband, the man she had loved since they were boy and girl together, and she, the girl, had seen him go away to sea in all the splendour of his naval suit and his gold-braided cap with the badge of a great steamship line on the front of it, and she had welcomed him back, voyage after voyage, until at last he had shown her father his master's "ticket" and his appointment as Second Officer on a crack Atlantic liner, and claimed the fulfilment of the promise which they both had made. After that had come the brief dream of happiness unspeakable; and then——

She wrenched her arm away from the grip of the hand that was holding it, and said in a whisper, which was eloquent with suppressed emotion not unmingled with anger and reproach, for in spite of her unquenched woman's love, she knew him now for what he was.

"What are *you* doing here, Arthur, First Officer of Mr. Staunton's yacht, after what has happened? Why should you be here to give me orders and warnings? Does Mr. Staunton know——"



This diagram shows how Ellerton was transported to the World beneath the Seas.

"For Heaven's sake, don't ask me any questions like that now, Janet. Even if I had time, I couldn't, I dare not, answer you, at least not here. Some day, perhaps—I hope so now that we have met against so strangely—but not now; it is impossible. Ah, there is the bell on the bridge. I must go! If there is anything on earth that is still dear to you, for its sake get out of sight before the watch comes on deck. If you were found here just now you might never see another sunrise."

He caught her left hand—from which the wedding ring had gone—between his two hands, pressed it passionately for a moment, and then, with a last look of eager appeal into her eyes, he released her and walked rapidly forward to the bridge ladder.

Whatever this terrible mystery might be which overhung the *Isola* and her doings, there could be no mistaking the intense earnestness of the man who was still, after all, her husband in the eye of the law. He could have no object in lying to her, and unless he had done that it was plain that she was risking her liberty, perhaps, as he had hinted, her very life, by remaining on deck. What was about to be done in this far-away part of the sea that she was forbidden to witness under such a terrible penalty? Surely, too, Doctor Billaud must have known of the strange prohibition, and yet he had expressly bidden her to take half-an-hour's walk on deck.

What could it all mean?

What was the real character of this millionaire's yacht, this floating palace which, as everyone knows, Royalty itself had honoured by its presence?

But while these questions were chasing each other through her brain, she saw silent, shadowy figures begin to creep quickly about the deck, and heard whispered orders pass from mouth to mouth.

She was no coward, but after what her husband had told her, it would have been mere folly to remain, and expose herself to insult and perhaps violence.

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She walked quickly to the saloon door on the other side of the deck to that on which the figures were moving, and slipped in just as a low whistle sounded from the bridge and the pad, pad of naked feet on the deck became louder.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

To a City Beneath the Sea.

When Darfield reached the bridge the rays of a small searchlight were shining on a little black buoy that was bobbing about on the water some fifty feet ahead of the *Isola*. There was nothing to distinguish it from the marks set by fishermen to indicate the position of their nets or lobster-pots—nothing to give the remotest hint that it was the clue to the greatest mystery of the twentieth century, a mystery which had been worrying the statesmen and financiers of Europe and America for nearly ten years past.

"You can lower away when you are ready, Mr. Martin," he said, after an anxious glance along the deck, as the Second saluted and left the bridge.

"Very well, sir. Everything is ready," was the reply.

A minute later a boat swung out on either side of the spar-deck and dropped almost noiselessly into the water. One of them pulled forward and took the end of a chain-cable which was being lowered out of one of the hawse-holes.

The yacht forged slowly up to the buoy, and when it was just under her sloping stem a man dressed in a diving-suit slipped over the side of the boat with the end of the chain in his hand and sank out of sight as the cranks of the air pump in the boat began to revolve.

Inside five minutes he came back up the rope-ladder which hung over the side and held out his hand. The end of an insulated wire, which communicated with the bridge, was passed to him, and he disappeared again.

He was a little longer below this time, and before he returned to the surface an electric bell tinkled in the chart-room in which Darfield was waiting with the telephone-receiver at his ear. The instrument began to buzz softly, and he said:

"Is that you, Herarra?"

"Yes, sir. We did not expect you so soon."

"No, this is a special trip. We have an important consignment for you. Is the chamber ready?"

"All ready, sir. Are we to expect the Señor?"

"No, he is in England. Señor Valdez and the Captain will bring the consignment to you as soon as we are ready. Stand by till I ring you up again."

"Very good, sir."

Then he went to another telephone and said to Don Ramiero, who was waiting in the Sanctum:

"Communication has been made, sir, and Herarra has the chamber ready."

"Very well. Tell him that the cable will be down in a minute or so. We are almost ready."

He hung up the receiver, went on to the platform, and descended into the lower chamber. Meanwhile the after-boat had picked up another mooring, and connected a cable with it.

"We are all fast, Captain," he said, with a glance at Ellerton's unconscious figure. "Mr. McAndrew can lower the cable as soon as he likes, and we had better get our patient below."

"Quite so, Señor," replied Darfield, going to the forward end wall and pressing a flat white button under one of the electric lights. One of the steel plates forming the wall fell back on a hinge. Beyond it was a sloping passage with a ribbed rubber floor leading down into the depths of the yacht amidships. At the lower end was an opening four feet high by three wide. Don Ramiero looked at the Captain and then at Ellerton. He understood, and between them they picked up the chair and carried Ellerton down the passage into the chamber at the end.

This was a little apartment, about the size of an ordinary passenger lift, but there were no seats in it, and so there was plenty of room for Ellerton's chair. When they had put it down Don Ramiero turned a switch, and a bulb in the roof began to glow. The Captain took a telephone transmitter from the wall, pressed a button, and said:

"Are you there, Mr. McAndrew? Yes. All ready? Very well. Run out the guiding-cable and the telephone wire, and when you hear that they have made fast below let me know. Thank you."

They waited for two or three minutes, during which they heard a sound as of a rope running swiftly over well-oiled bearings, over the fore part of the lift—for such this little chamber really was, though it was the strangest contrivance of its kind in the world. Then it stopped, and presently the bell rang.

"Yes," said the Captain, taking down the transmitter, "what's that? They've made fast? Good. Then I will close up and you may lower when I ring. Thank you. Good-bye for the present."

He turned a lever in the wall beside the opening by which they had entered, and a slab of steel slid noiselessly down, exactly fitting a rubber-padded slot which ran round three sides on the inside, and made the chamber both air and water-tight. At the same time Don Ramiero turned a little tap in the opposite wall and a cool stream of fresh air, stored under pressure in a reservoir in the roof, began to flow into the chamber.

The Captain touched the bell again, the lift sank about ten feet, and stopped; a heavy steel plate slid forward and covered the space it had left, then a portion of the yacht's double skin, a little to the starboard side of the keel, and just large enough for the diving-bell—for that is what the lift had now become—fell outward on a hinge and the water rushed in and surrounded the little chamber. The falling motion began again, and Ellerton had begun the first brief stage of his momentous journey to the Underworld.

The diving-chamber sank slowly, and in about five minutes it came quietly to rest on the bottom of the North Sea some sixty fathoms beneath the surface. The guiding-cable, down which it had slid from the yacht, led into another chamber which was structurally similar to the one which it had just left. It sank down, a heavy steel plate slid over it, a pair of rubber-lined jaws gripped the cable and stopped all inflow of water; another plate slid away from beneath, the water about the chamber fell away, and then it sank another twenty feet and came to rest.

"We have arrived," said the Captain, with a smiling look at Ellerton, "and before long this gentleman will, I suppose, awake in a new world. Ah, well, it is not to everybody that such wonderful experiences are given in these unromantic days. It is to be hoped that he will appreciate them at their proper value."

"It is at least somewhat doubtful," replied Don Ramiero drily, "the wonders will, of course, be there, Mr. Ellerton's appreciation of them under the peculiar circumstances is quite another matter."

At this moment the telephone bell rang three times. It was the signal that all was ready for the gates of the Underworld to be opened. Captain Durtal pulled the lever and the door-plate rose. A flood of soft light and a rush of cool, fresh air came in together, and an unmistakably Spanish tenor voice said:

"Welcome, Señors, to the Land beneath the Sea. Ah, and so this, I presume, is the consignment of which you told me over the telephone?"

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"Yes, Señor Herarra," replied Don Ramiero, in his most formal tones, "This gentleman," he continued, moving towards the chair, "is, as you see, seriously unwell. The Señor has come to the conclusion that a change of air will benefit him, and so he has instructed me to bring him into this retreat of ours and commend him to your most scrupulous care. Will you now be good enough to send a couple of your men to carry him to more comfortable quarters?"

"The Señor's wishes are the laws of the Underworld—which is his." replied Leon Herarra, a big, black-bearded, blue-eyed Andalusian, who, for a few years past, had been very badly wanted by the police of half the Governments of Europe, for the very sufficient reason that he possessed such an incomparable genius for coining and bank-note counterfeiting that the said Governments would have thought half a million sterling quite a reasonable price for his permanent retirement from business.

They had now begun to think that he had done so of his own free will and on a very handsome fortune. The fact was that he had accepted the very responsible position of Isolo Staunton's Viceroy in his Kingdom under the Seas.

"Excuse me a moment, Señors," he continued, stepping back into the passage. Then he called out in strongly-accented but perfectly plain English:

"Sigur, Elfreth, come here and bring two others. There is a precious burden to be borne. It is the Master's will."

There was a shuffling as of sandalled feet in the gallery, accompanied by a hoarse muttering of male voices, and the next moment four figures clad in grey woollen jumpers and short trousers appeared at the door.

If any of the late guests on board the *Isola* could, by any miracle of second sight, have been enabled to view the scene in the diving-chamber they would have been able to tell a story which the most credulous readers of newspaper sensations would have had some difficulty in believing. The four men who, in obedience to a few sharp orders from Herrara, took up the chair in which Ellerton sat, supported by a broad strap which the Captain had passed underneath his armpits and round the back, were in truth, not at all unlike those imaginary inhabitants of that other Underworld which the tellers of fairy-tales have pictured.

Although stunted in stature, and somewhat bent in shape, their shoulders were broad and their bare arms sinewy and muscular like their legs which were bare from the knee downwards. Their height was only an inch or so over five feet; but their heads were large enough for men of six feet. Their hair, cropped almost close to their skulls, was of a greyish white, and the skin of their faces, arms, and legs was almost of the same hue, and absolutely bloodless. Their eyes were covered with shades, as though to protect them from the glow of the electric lamps, which was, in fact, the case.

Such were the gnomes who, in the silence and semi-darkness of this world beneath the ocean, toiled like the slaves of some Eastern Genie, to increase the inexhaustible treasure whose possession made Isolo Staunton and his partner, Derrick Kesteven, the richest, and therefore, in the material sense at least, the most powerful men in the world.

Don Ramiero and the Captain followed Herarra and the bearers along the passage, which was some four hundred yards in length. The end was closed by a steel door similar to those in the water-tight compartments of warships. Herarra motioned to the bearers to stop, and putting his finger on a button at the side of the door, sent a signal in "longs and shorts," which, though inaudible in the tunnel, informed his second in command that the door was to be opened in the name of the Lord of the Underworld.

"I see that the precautions are as strict as ever, M. Herarra, said the captain in French, "and yet surely your domain should be safe enough even with open doors."

"Nothing is reasonably safe, Monsieur, until all possible precautions have been taken," replied the Spaniard in the same language. "We have these fellows pretty well in hand, but for all that, it would not do to let them know too much. Besides, you know, if by any means, through treason perhaps, the secret of our communication with the

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other world got known, this one gallery would be the extent of the invader's discovery. A knock on that door, or anything but the correct signal on the bell—and the door would remain fast and the gallery would be instantly flooded. No, no, we take no risks down here."

"And quite right, too!" laughed Captain Durtal, as the door slid slowly back in its grooves and they passed through into the ante-chamber of the Underworld.

The door closed again the moment they had entered, and as the bearers set their burden down at a sign from Herarra, he turned to Don Ramiero and asked:

"What are your wishes, Señor, as to the disposal of this gentleman, who, I presume, has had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of the Señor? Is it intended to terminate an existence which may have become superfluous or inconvenient?"

"No," replied Don Ramiero quickly, "it is not exactly that, although, with regard to the world which this gentleman has just left, it is so.

"His continued existence there has, unhappily, become an impossibility. For private reasons of his own, into which, as you are aware, it would be out of the question for us to inquire, the Señor has, as I may say, commuted sentence of death into one of perpetual banishment. I have your written instructions in my pocket, and if you will be good enough to let us have the use of one of your apartments for half-an-hour or so, I will give them to you and explain matters more fully."

"By all means and with the most cordial welcome, Señor," replied Herarra, with his most genial smile, for he was not a little pleased at being intrusted with what he rightly deemed to be a most important charge.

He gave a brief order to the bearers and as they resumed their burden, he went on:

"It is fortunate that I have just completed an extension of my dwelling-place. It was for that I asked for my last consignment of furniture. I have decorated it in Oriental style, and I venture to think you will find it comfortable. Will you be good enough to follow me."

They followed him and the bearers across the smoothly-levelled floor of a vast cavern from the invisible roof of which hung three great electric arc-lamps. Dim, almost ghost-like figures, clad as the bearers were, flitted hither and thither, all with bent heads and shaded eyes, most of them carrying burdens which, though small, appeared to be fairly heavy.

They passed through a roughly-hewn archway, one of several which led on all sides out of the vast ante-chamber, almost directly opposite the door by which they had entered, and came to a door which Herrara opened with a little key attached to his watch-chain.

When the bearers had gone through in obedience to a sign from him, he stood aside and said, with a motion of his left hand towards the door:

"Señors, do me the honour of entering."

Herarra closed the door behind them as they entered, and turned a couple of switches on a wooden panel just beside it. The dim glow of a single bulb overhead was instantly drowned in a flood of light which revealed to the visitors a scene in which the splendour of the East was admirably blended with the solid comfort of the West. The entrance-hall, as it might well be called, of the Viceroy's residence, was roofed with tent-like hangings of pale blue silk which, in the shimmer of the electric lights, looked strangely like the twilight sky of the Overworld, and its walls were hung with gorgeously-coloured carpets, the choicest products of Indian, Persian and Turkish looms. The floor of polished black stone was covered with skins of the white polar bear.

Their host turned to the right when they had gone about ten paces, and drew aside a curtain of heavy crimson silk, saying:

"This is the apartment, Señor Valdez, in which I propose to receive our guest. I trust that it may impress him favourably."

"Upon my word, Señor," exclaimed Don Ramiero, as his host switched on the lights and he looked about the magnificently-appointed chamber, "I must congratulate you on the excellence of your taste and the industry of your servants. Yildiz Kiosk itself has nothing to show like this. Our young friend should be fairly comfortable here."

"I hope so, Señor," replied Herarra, as he motioned to the bearers to put the chair in the middle of the room. "You may rest assured that no effort will be wanting on my part to reconcile him to his exchange of worlds—always supposing that I am instructed to do so."

"You are," said Don Ramiero, taking an envelope from the inside pocket of his coat. "Here are the orders of the Señor; you can consult them at your leisure. He will sleep for about an hour yet. During that time we can have a little necessary conversation, and you can send any cargo that you have available down to the lift. We must not keep the yacht waiting more than an hour, for we have an important appointment to keep a long way from here."

All the conversation with Herarra was conducted in Spanish, but his orders to the bearers were given in English, the only language, save their own ancient Norse, that the slaves of the Underworld were permitted to use.

Ellerton was lifted out of the chair and laid in a silken-hung recess in which a favourite of Haroun al Raschid himself might have been well content to repose.

Then Herarra, excusing himself for a moment, took the bearers to the door and sent them out, locking it behind them.

When he came back he was followed by three girls dressed in Oriental costume. They were exquisitely and yet strangely beautiful. Their features were small and almost perfectly regular. Their faces were bloodless, yet their skin was as clear as polished ivory, and their arms gleamed whitely through the gauze of their long, flowing sleeves. Their eyelids, golden-fringed, drooped over great sky-blue eyes, shielding them from the glow of the lights, and their pale yellow hair fell over their shoulders in shimmering ripples which almost touched the floor behind them as they walked.

Each of them carried a large silver salver. On one stood a couple of bottles of champagne, on the other some glasses and little bottles of liqueurs, and on the third silver trays filled with cigars and cigarettes.

"You see, Señors," said Herarra with a smile which showed two rows of brilliantly white teeth under his black moustache, "that we are well served in other ways than mere labour. I regret that my wife is not at present well enough to do the honours of her home, but she has sent three of her handmaids to wait upon us. A glass of wine and a cigar will make a pleasant conversation all the pleasanter. I presume that you do not wish our guest to be awakened——"

"No, no," replied Don Ramiero quickly. "It might be dangerous to disturb him before the time I mentioned, and you will see that it is the Señor's desire that he should awake amidst his new surroundings as from a dream, and with no links to connect him with the past."

"I fully understand you, Señor. His second existence shall be as distinct from his first as though he had been spirited away to another planet," answered Herarra as he proceeded to open one of the bottles of champagne.

———

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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THE THREE LOVE LETTERS.

Telling How a Girl Answered Them.

"Who is she?"

"Old John Sargent's daughter; he died when she was a child, you know, and left his entire fortune to her."

"Why isn't she married?"

"They say she has buried her heart in Charlie Cutter's grave. You remember poor Charlie was thrown from his horse some five years ago and broke his neck and her heart at one blow. She is a fine girl, though, isn't she? No use trying to get her, Billy. Settle down and calm yourself. My sister says she never had a spark of sentiment about her anyway, but now she seems to have lost all interest in anything. Oh, no, not a mean streak in her nature. She is very generous with her money, but gives as though she did not care a straw what she was giving to—unnatural, very."

"By Jove, I think the girl has a heart within her, and if I were going to be in town this winter, I would try and reach it! She walks like a queen. What is she doing here?"

"Going to the cemetery. She has a key to the side entrance and they say she comes here at all hours of the day or night, but there is never a flower on Charlie's grave. She makes no outward show."

"Does she live alone?"

"No; houseful of servants, and a cousin or something as a companion; she used to do 'slumming, but I heard she got mixed up in a row one night and was hustled off to the police-station before the policeman found out who she was, but the whole force apologised, and she was sent home, so they say, in the Black Maria. Anyway she gets someone else to slum nowadays, and she pays the bills."

"Is she a blue-stocking?"

"Oh, steady, Will, she is nothing but what a man would want his wife, mother, or sister to be—with a couple of millions thrown in.

"She goes on the Continent, so Sallie says, every time she hears of anyone who wants a start in art or science, and pretends it is a favour to her that the poor student accepts a couple of years' receipted bills.

"She runs a free children's school and dances beautifully.

"She takes a box by the season at the Gaiety, and turns it over to the young folks like the dear that she is; but, by Jove, she would give you the same kind of a nod, if she met you, as she would her cook, and there would be no more heart or soul in her greeting than in a dish of uncooked mushrooms.

"I hate to have a woman so independent and so polite that one can't catch hold of a straw for a good foundation for criticism. I wish you were going to be here, Billy. If one could move her, you could. But she is beautiful and no mistake. Here comes Ned in his trap—alone, too—good luck, we'll ride home! Hi! Ned! Room for two? Thanks."

That day Dorothy Sargent entered the silent City of the

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Dead with more than sadness in her sweet face, and as she reached the grave that held all that was mortal of the one man she had ever loved, she pressed her face against the marble cross, and in her anguish cried aloud, "Help me, dearest!"

Suddenly, as though the load were lifted from her heart, and her prayer answered, she sprang from the ground and hurried home.

Going at once to her room, she took from her desk three letters; bowing her head upon her hands, she whispered, "Whatever is is right, my love will guide me. I will be satisfied."

A messenger had brought her the first letter from the Metropolitan Club. She drew it from the envelope, and re-read the lines she knew she would have to answer.

"*Before you opened the envelope which holds this letter, Dorothy Sargent, you knew who was the writer, and you knew what he had to tell you.*

"*By breaking the seal you have proved you are willing once again to listen to me.*

"*I have returned to my native land after an exile of ten weary years. God knows I did my best to give my wife the love she craved, and he knows I did my best to make her happy, and was as true as steel to her, but in His wisdom, which I dare not question, He gave her pure mind the power of seeing beyond what I gave her, and the dear child returned to her Maker broken-hearted, leaving me and our four motherless children to you, my one love, my one thought, and my dearest wish.*

"*Would that you were poor, that I might give to you what you could not otherwise have!*

"*Nothing but pity for Marion's children, for my children, can tempt you to come to me now? Come! I will make you love me, I will, and you must know it.*

"*No man ever gave to a woman a purer love than is offered to you again.*

"*Give to me this one word I crave, in the name of the innocent woman who knew she held the heart that belonged to another. I cry to you—and not in vain?*" "JOHN H. NORTON."

Rigid and white as death she threw the letter on the burning coals, and watched the flames devour the paper till there was nothing left but a grey mass that trembled and fell to pieces as a whiff of wind blew across the grate.

Opening the second letter she read:

"DEAREST,—*For the years I have known and loved you, I have never till now dared to tell you of my love.*

"*You were rich, I was poor. Shame on me that I would so belittle you! As though you did not know an honest man's heart is worth more than Cræsus' wealth.*

"*You know what I have done in the scientific world, but you do not know that what I have accomplished has been through you, and that for you alone I have succeeded.*

"*I dare now to offer you the heart and life which will go on and on working for you, spurred by the glorious knowledge that you have said, 'I love you.'*

"*May I go to you and take you in my arms and hold you close to the heart that beats for you alone?*

"*That I have told you of my love makes me happy. That you will bid me come is the prayer of—Thine,*" "SYLVESTER NEWCOMB."

As the poor girl finished reading this letter, she threw it, as she had done the other, in the fire. As she watched it burn she said aloud, "I could be happy with him; his profession would be more to him than he imagines, and he might not see I cannot love as he does."

And she read the third letter:

"MY DEAR DOROTHY,—*You were a little girl when I saw you first. I loved you then because your beautiful eyes were so like those God had given to the woman I was soon to marry.*

"*You know of the short year of happiness which was granted me, and you know what a long, weary life I have had since my wife died.*

"*You, dear, have been, and are, the one woman in this world to whom I can offer myself and what is left of my life and heart.*

"*I do love you, not with the boyhood passion you may crave, but with the true and honest love of a man old enough to be your father. For years I have loved you thus, and would not tell you, dear. I wanted you to have the happiness which a younger man might give you, and I loved you so tenderly, I wanted you to have what would please you most.*

"*You know your own heart's story. I do not ask you to tell me anything, but, if you will be my wife, I will do all in my power to make you as happy as I know you can make me.*

"*Send me one word, dear, and I will promise to watch over the treasure God has trusted to my care, if you will bid me come.—Faithfully yours,*" "THOMAS OTIS SEWELL."

"He asks so little! I ought to be able to live with him and be happy. I will be making less sacrifice if I say 'Come' to him, and his dear old gentle life will be a benediction indeed."

With tears in her eyes she laughed aloud as she threw this last letter into the fire, and while watching it burn she said:

"I can't marry them all."

Taking a sheet of paper in her hand and smoothing it gently, as though giving it a little blessing, she dipped her pen in the ink, and with a shudder as though it were with her blood she were writing, she wrote the one word—"Come!"

Folding the paper she put it in an envelope and sealed it.

She then drew another sheet from the case before her and wrote upon it—

"MY DEAR, DEAR FRIEND,—*I love you too well to give myself to you, and myself is all I have to give.*

"*God grant you may find a woman worthy of your honest love, is the prayer of,*" "DOROTHY SARGENT."

Inclosing this letter in an envelope and sealing it, she gave a sigh of relief, and took another sheet of paper, on which she wrote a similar reply.

And she sealed this, as she had the others, and went to the library, leaving all three of her answers on her desk.

Touching the bell in the hall as she passed through, the butler answered her call.

"James, tell Poole to bring me the three letters on my desk. She may stamp them first."

Her maid brought her the letters. Stepping to the table, she bowed her head and whispered: "God help me to direct these aright."

She directed one to John Norton, the second to Professor Sylvester Newcomb, and the third to Thomas Otis Sewell.

To which would the fateful missive go?

Louise Clark.

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VENO'S LIGHTNING COUGH CURE

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MR. JAS. COLE.
From a Photo.

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TESTIMONIAL—Oaksey Manor, Malmesbury, 19/6/03.—LADY FAIRBAIRN writes: "Received the Skirt, with which she was greatly pleased, and hopes to order more soon."
To Readers of Short Stories. 14/11/1903.

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F. Hodgson and Sons, City of Leeds, will forward, carriage paid, on following conditions—namely, on receipt of postal order for 3/6, with postage (4d. extra), a Lady's Beautiful Tailor Made Cloth Serge Dress Skirt, in Navy or Black, smartly trimmed, with mercerised satinette strapping (as illustration), also good linen-ette pocket. We shall include FREE with each Skirt a pretty Open-hemmed Lawn HANDKERCHIEF. Money willingly returned if not approved.

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12/6 Lady's handsome **18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch**, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed) elegant West-End pattern the two together.

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19/6 **Genuine Italian Mandoline**, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.

8/9 **Feather Boas**; bankrupt stock; special bargains: real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white black and white, and natural.

10/6 **Lustrous** diamond and ruby **Half-hoop Ring**, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 **Curb Chain Bracelet**, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 **Brooch**; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- **Lady's** solid gold **Keyless Watch**, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 **Fashionable Long Neck-chain**; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

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This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, Lquilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saying 5/-. Address below.

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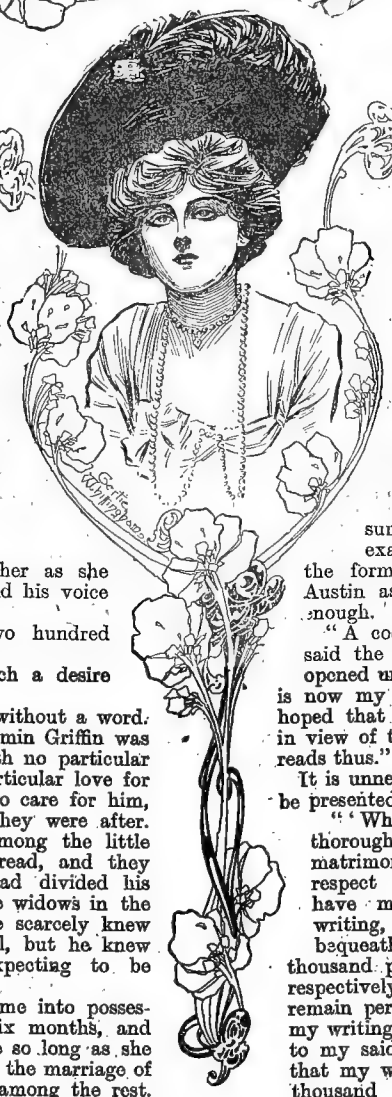

Telling How Seven Women—Wealth, and —Chose Between Love and the Result.

"WHAT does this mean?" he asked.

"Reuben——"

She hesitated.

"Well?"

"I fear—that an obstacle has arisen to our marriage."

"What obstacle could arise?"

"Two hundred thousand pounds have been bequeathed to me, on condition that I should not——"

Again she hesitated.

"Marry?"

"Yes."

He grew paler, and stood looking at her as she averted her eyes. Presently he spoke and his voice quivered:

"And you, choosing between the two hundred thousand and me, prefer the money."

"It is such a fortune, and I have such a desire for it!"

Reuben Austin, turning away, left her without a word. It was certainly a strange will, but Benjamin Griffin was a strange man. He died a bachelor, with no particular love for anybody and no one had any particular love for him. True, his few relatives pretended to care for him, but he knew that it was his money they were after. Consequently there was consternation among the little band of mourners when the will was read, and they learnt that the eccentric Benjamin had divided his fortune equally among seven marriageable widows in the town of Rathbone, where he resided. He scarcely knew them, for he avoided the sex in general, but he knew that they were all anxious—nay, expecting to be married again at no distant day.

The condition was that each should come into possession of her two hundred thousand in six months, and should continue in possession of the same so long as she remained unmarried; and in the event of the marriage of one, her share should be equally divided among the rest.

The seven widows walked out of the house. Before nine o'clock that evening there were seven miserable men in Rathbone. Six received peremptory orders to cease their attentions. The seventh, a good-looking young man with bright eyes and honest countenance, called on Mrs. Douglas, with what result we have seen. With her, as with the others, money overbalanced love.

The six other widows watched her house to see if he repeated his visits. They were wishing he would, for her share would then fall to them. The last week but one before the six months had passed, Reuben Austin was busy in his shop whistling at his work, trying to be merry, though he had lost twenty pounds since he lost his love.

"Reuben!"

"Good Heavens!"

That exclamation will help to convey an idea of the thrill that went through him at the sound of the familiar voice.

He turned and saw Mrs. Douglas standing in the doorway.

"Reuben, I shall not take the money!"

"Do you prefer me?"

"Yes."

"Dearest!"

It was in broad daylight or he would have caught her in his arms after the usual fashion.

Before the week was out they were married, and the other six rejoiced. In a day or two, according to notification, the heirs would hear from the executor.

Mrs. Austin, once Mrs. Douglas, was summoned with the rest. They found exactly the same company present as on the former reading. Everyone stared at Mrs. Austin as she came in, but she looked happy enough.

"A codicil to the will read six months ago," said the executor, "then sealed and not to be opened until now, was attached. That codicil it is now my business to read to you. It is to be hoped that no one will be unpleasantly disappointed in view of the terms laid down in said codicil which reads thus."

It is unnecessary to give it all here. Enough will be presented to make everything clear.

"'Whereas I, Benjamin Griffin, having a thorough disgust of money considerations in matrimonial projects, and entertaining a high respect for matrimonial affection and fidelity, have made my last will and testament in writing, bearing date, etc., and have hereby bequeathed the value of my fourteen hundred thousand pounds to seven widows of, etc., named respectively, etc., on condition that each shall remain perpetually unmarried; now I do by this, my writing—which I hereby declare to be a codicil to my said will—I do hereby order and declare that my will is that only the sum of one hundred thousand be under the provisions stated divided among said, etc., provided each shall, notwithstanding the temptation I have set in her way, remain true to her matrimonial engagement with the gentleman she now lovingly professes to be the choice of her heart.

"'In case one or any of the said, etc., should discard or fail to marry said man of her choice, I do hereby order and declare that the said sum or sums shall to her or them be forfeited; and if one or any of the said, etc., remain true to said, etc., share or shares falling to the lot of those who prove untrue, shall be given to her or them in equal shares.'"

"The hundred thousand pounds then falls to Mrs. Austin, who, I believe, is the only one among the within-named parties who has adopted the course which secures a title to the money bequeathed."

Six disappointed women filed out of the room. The rest of the fortune was divided among relatives.

"I am so glad that I was true to you, dear," said Mrs. Austin to her husband. "We will be so happy!"

Emily Howell.

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The Early Bird.

"You will come home early, won't you?" she said, as he was starting for the club. "Oh, yes; I'll come home early," he replied. "But, of course, dear," she persisted, "you understand that I mean early to-night, not early to-morrow morning?"

He Needed Prompting.

"You protest that you love me, Emily, but I am still waiting for the first kiss." "Well, why do you wait?"

A Wise Woman.

"They say her husband gratifies her smallest wish." "Very likely. She knows better than to have any big wishes."

Proof Positive.

Mabel: "I hope I didn't break Jack's heart when I refused him." Dora: "I don't think you did. He offered it to me the next day."

Circumstances Alter Cases.

She: "I shall have to refuse you again." He: "But this is positively the last time I shall propose." She: "Oh, well, that's different. Why didn't you say so?"

Cause For Grumbling.

"He tried to kiss me and I just told him to behave," said an irate young lady after a ball. "Well, did he kiss you?" asked her friend. "No. He behaved."

Happily Married.

Mrs. Nextdoor: "I suppose your daughter is happily married?" Mrs. Nagsby: "Indeed she is. Why, her husband is actually afraid to open his mouth in her presence."

Rough on Bertha.

Bertha: "I think Harry is soft enough for anything." Bessie: "So do I. Oh, by-the-way, dear, that reminds me. Last night I overheard him say he was going to propose to you."

A Great Attraction.

Fred: "So you are going to marry Miss Millyuns, eh? I don't see what you can find to admire in a girl of her stamp." Joe: "My dear boy, it isn't her stamp that attracts me; it's her cheque. See?"

An Apparent Deduction.

"This is a pretty time of night for that girl next door to be playing the piano!" remarked an indignant lady to her husband. "Oh, she's no respecter of time! You can tell that from the way she's playing!" rejoined he.

His Love Was Great But His Wealth Was Not.

Lover: "You are getting prettier every day." Sweet Girl: "Just now I am living on brown bread and water to improve my complexion." "How long can you keep that up?" "Oh, indefinitely." "Then let's get married."

Identification.

"Come here, my little Eddie," said a gentleman to a youngster of seven years of age, while sitting in the parlour where a large company was assembled, "do you know me?" "Yes, sir; I think I do." "Who am I, then? Let me hear." "You are the man who kissed sister Angeline last night in the parlour." Angeline fainted.

A Paying Profession.

"What's his business?" "Well, as near as I can make out he is matrimonial agent for his two daughters."

Rather Curious.

Watson: "Women are always curious." Johnson: "My wife isn't curious a bit." Watson: "Then she must be a curious woman."

He Was Bunkered.

Beatrice: "You know, Will said he'd like to be caught playing golf?" Patience: "Yes." "Well, I caught him on the links this afternoon. We're engaged."

A Most Unfortunate Scribe.

"He's an unfortunate man of letters." "Why, I never heard he was an author." "Well, he was the author of several letters that lost him a breach of promise case."

Not to Blame.

"Here, we have only been married two days, Clarence, and you're scolding me already." "I know, my dear, but just think how long I have been waiting for the chance."

Pa Mistook the Young Man's Mission.

"I am going to marry your daughter, sir," said the positive young man to the father. "Well, you needn't come to me for sympathy," replied the father. "I have troubles of my own."

Mutual Disapprobation.

Mrs. A. Cerbity: "You have accepted George? Why, you know very well that I don't approve of him." Her Daughter: "That's all right, mother. Neither does he approve of you!"

How Disappointed She Was.

Jack: "I have just received a telegram saying that a rich aunt, my only relative, has died and left me——" His Fiancée (eagerly): "Yes, and left you——" Jack: "All alone in the world."

Out of the Frying Pan.

Harris: "Walter has been looking pretty bad since his daughter got married, hasn't he?" Correll: "Yes; you see, he had no sooner got his daughter off his hands than he found he would have to put her husband on his feet."

She Anticipated Troubles.

Mabel: "Yes, dear, I will be a helpmate to you, and try to lighten the daily troubles and worries of your life as best I can." Arthur: "But I have none, darling." Mabel: "Oh, you old goose! I mean when we are married, of course!"

Hopeful Girl!

He (timidly): "Now that we are engaged, I—I presume I may—may kiss you as much as I please, mayn't I?" She (encouragingly): "Yes, indeed. Make the most of your time, dear. There's no telling how long an engagement will last nowadays, you know."

Fickle Woman!

"I am the unluckiest man alive!" "What's the matter?" "Why, I heard that she was engaged, so I went round and proposed to her, so that she wouldn't think I had been trifling with her." "And wasn't she engaged?" "Yes; but she broke it off. She said my love was more sincere than his."

He Came from Sussex.

She was pretty and sweet and poetic, and he was young and mischievous. "Oh, how I love to sit out here in the moonlight," she cooed; "to be fanned by the languorous perfumes of the roses and to be kissed by the soft airs from the south!" Then he kissed her and she grew indignant. "How dare you?" she almost sobbed. "Why, I'm a soft heir from the south," he replied. She didn't say anything when he kissed her again.

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"Why don't you drink Vi-Cocoa?"

Every working man and woman should be asked this question daily.

The opinion of the Rev. F. F. Taylor, of Suddenham, near Manchester, who writes:—"I like Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa very much, and have used it every day. I believe it is all you represent it to be. It is far away to be preferred to tea, coffee, and other cocoas," is the opinion of thousands.

You must have read the striking testimony that is being published daily respecting the merits of Vi-Cocoa. And yet you have not tried it. We advise you to do so at once.

Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa can be obtained in 6d. packets and 9d. and 1s. 6d. tins from all grocers and stores; or the Proprietors will send you free a dainty sample tin upon receipt of a post-card to 60, Bunhill Row, London, E.C., asking them to do so.

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5/-.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

After the Dance.

"I MET a young man at a dance recently," writes "ADA," "but did not care for him at all. The other day, I saw him coming along the street, and avoided him. Was this a breach of etiquette, and should I see him again. Am I forced to recognise him?"

* * * * *

It is largely a matter of choice whether or not a girl resumes the acquaintance of a man whom she has met casually. If you have some definite reason for disliking him, and not wishing to know him, you can avoid noticing him without breaking a social rule. On the other hand, I do not advocate "cutting" people without very good reason. If the young man was merely harmless, and not really objectionable, a bow from you would do no harm, and you would avoid hurting his feelings. At the same time, men should bear in mind that it is the woman's prerogative to signify whether or not she wishes to resume a man's acquaintance. If she definitely shows that she does not wish to do so, he should avoid, when next meeting her, giving the impression that he wishes to press his acquaintance on her.

Family v. Lover.

"A READER." I am always pleased to hear opinions of my readers on any question I may discuss in this page, even if they do not agree with my own. I do not pretend to be infallible, especially on such vexed questions as some readers submit, and very often there is a good deal to be said on the other side. A week or so back, I advised lovers not to omit civility and kindness to their sweetheart's families, as a girl resented anything like a slight on her people. Now you say "you would not give a snap of the finger for a girl who loved her family more than you." You add that, "if a girl truly loves a man, she will decide with him against the whole world."

* * * * *

Now, this sounds very pretty, and is, I know, what we are always taught in stories to believe to be right. But you must remember that there are times in the stages of love when a girl, though she may feel deeply drawn towards a man, is not disposed to take his part against those whom she has loved all her life—her parents. Anything like a slight to them might arouse such feelings of resentment that her whole attitude might be changed towards the man she thought she loved. When a man and woman are bound together in love, and any dispute arises in which the woman has to choose between her family and himself, I believe it is right for love to win the victory. But experience proves that a good many things may happen to destroy what is supposed to be "love," and the instance I gave is among them.

Is Twenty Too Young to Marry?

"Is twenty too young for a man to marry?" asks "PERCY," who is that age, and engaged.

* * * * *

In my opinion, yes. Another two or three years, at least, should elapse before you take the step. At twenty, a man is far from having reached maturity in mind or body, and to be saddled with the cares of a household, and perhaps a family, so early in life must affect his working powers in business.

A Too Flippant Girl.

"THOMAS" is troubled by a young lady who is too flippant. He thinks he is very fond of her, but finds that whenever he talks seriously to her, she turns it into a joke. She is very fond, too, of chaffing him, and making him a laughing stock, which "THOMAS" cannot bear.

* * * * *

If, after knowing you better, "THOMAS," the girl continues to tease you, and you still find that it makes you unhappy, I think you had better let the affair drop. If one person has a sense of humour, or is frivolous, and the other very serious, I do not think they can be very well suited to each other. You will both find the other a source of irritation as time goes on, for humour must be shared and not one-sided.

A Case for an Apology.

"I USED to go out a great deal with a girl friend," writes WALLACE, "but one day, I was worried over business, and said something which offended her. She left me soon after, rather coldly, and did not see me again for some time. Then I heard that another man was paying her attentions. Now I find that I am really much fonder of the girl than I thought, and that she is necessary to my happiness. But what am I to do? I offended her, and another man took my place."

* * * * *

There can be no possible harm in your offering your apologies to her for your rudeness, and asking permission to see her again. If she consents, then you may take it that she has forgiven you, and that she is not committed to the attentions of your rival. If otherwise, and she will not consent to your meeting again, you must realise that you have lost her, and I fear, rather through your own fault.

Love and Business.

"I AM in love with a girl," writes "UNDECIDED" (Johannesburg), "and thinks he returns my affection. My prospects are not very bright at present. Would it be right for me to propose to the girl, and tell her all, for it may be years before I can marry. Would it not be better if I avoided her altogether?"

* * * * *

You do not yet know whether the girl returns your love. Would it not be better for you to avoid even broaching the subject of marriage until you know her better? As to your prospects, tell her candidly what they are. It will be a test of her love to see whether she, knowing the truth, is willing for you to continue paying her attentions. As to the wisdom of your proposing, or avoiding her altogether, certainly the wiser course would be the latter. You have to make way for yourself in the world, and in a colony, and a man in that position should certainly give as much of his attention as possible to business. To be committed to marriage might handicap you in the struggle, and would be placing a great tie on the girl.

Cynthia.

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4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

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HINTS

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